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THE MOTHERS, THE PHORCIDES AND THE CABIRI IN GOETHE'S "FAUST"

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In a recent interpretation of the *Faust* scene "Finstere Galerie" Friedrich Bruns astutely observes that in connection with the Mothers "die bisherige Faustforschung mit einer wenig beachteten oder als belanglos auf die Seite geschobenen Ausnahme Mütterembryologie getrieben [hat]." ¹ Clarifying and developing ideas of Obenauer and Rickert, and eliminating one by one widely accepted interpretations of the Realm of the Mothers which are contradicted by the actual evidence of the text of *Faust* or which cannot be reconciled with Goethe's known aesthetic and philosophico-scientific theories, Bruns comes to the conclusion: "Das Reich der Mütter ist die Vergangenheit, im weiteren Sinn die Geschichte, in der das Vergangene weiter west, nicht ohne Gefahr für das nach neuen Zielen drängende Leben" (378). With this conclusion I can only agree, for it is confirmed — as Bruns himself shows, especially in the final pages of his essay — by the scene "Rittersaal," by the prologue to the Classical Walpurgisnight, and by the transformation of the heroine of the "Helena" from a figure of classical antiquity to a living contemporary of Faust's. Although it seems to me that several of the novel corollaries which Bruns develops in the course of his article are contradicted by textual evidence, they do not invalidate his main conclusion and so shall not be discussed in the following attempt to show the affiliation of the Phorcides and the Cabiri of two later *Faust* scenes with the Mothers of "Finstere Galerie" and "Rittersaal." One of his premises, however, seems to me to be untenable: viz., that the only important dramatic function of the scene "Finstere Galerie" is simply to define the Realm of the Mothers (so that, for instance, in "Rittersaal" Faust may be represented as advancing beyond a dead and dangerous past toward a more living present). This premise, which is, to be sure, implicit rather than explicit in Bruns' discussion, not only allows him to ignore the forty-two lines of text that lead up to Mephisto's introduction of the

¹ "Die Mütter in Goethes *Faust*: Versuch einer Deutung," *Monatshefte*, XLIII (1951), 365-89 (p. 371).

Realm of the Mothers (373) – but it also causes him to accept, I think somewhat uncritically, the consensus of more recent *Faust* interpreters that the scene “Finstere Galerie” is strictly serious in tone.

“Die Worte Mephistos [i. e., 6212 ff.] ergreifen Faust,” Bruns declares, “wie jeden aufnahmefähigen Leser. Wer hier Unsinn und Hocus Pocus wittert, darf so wenig über diese Dichtung sprechen wie ein Tontauben über eine Bachsche Fuge” (373). Without denying that I feel something like awe at the passage in question and at some of the passages subsequent to it in the same scene, I am nevertheless persuaded that if anywhere in *Faust II* there are the “sehr ernste Scherze” alluded to by Goethe in his letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt under the date of March 17, 1832, they are to be found in the scene “Finstere Galerie.” For it opens with comic motifs already familiar from earlier scenes (6173-6: Mephisto’s feigned ignorance of Faust’s reason for drawing him aside, as recognized by Faust 6179-80; 6193-6202: Mephisto’s feigned impotence to provide something Faust wants, as recognized by Faust 6203) and with the ironico-comic motif that the hero who has in “Anmutige Gegend” resolved “Zum höchsten Dasein immerfort zu streben” and whose great masquerade was largely an allegory representing the desirability of nobler forms of “Tätigkeit” should be “gequält zu tun” by an Emperor who merely wants to be amused by *tableaux vivants* of Helen and Paris. Moreover, as Mephisto becomes eloquent about the Realm of the Mothers, Faust observes “Hier wittert’s nach der Hexenküche” – the latter a scene so patently parodistic in its treatment of vulgar superstitions that mention of it can only make doubtful the assumption that we are to fall under the spell of Mephisto’s hypnotizing eloquence in the same measure that Faust does. And, finally, the scene ends with Mephisto mildly – and is not Mephistophelean mildness always ironic in *Faust*? – remarking “Wenn ihm der Schlüssel nur zum besten frommt! / Neugierig bin ich, ob er wiederkommt?”, an exclamation and a question so completely lacking in pathos as to cast doubt upon the reliability of Mephisto’s preceding statements and even upon the “heroism” which Faust’s descent to the Realm of the Mothers will actually demand.

To suggest that Faust’s ordeal is less than dangerous, and perhaps less than important (except in so far as it leads to his “Raub der Helena,” to physical unconsciousness, and hence to a Classical Walpurgisnight which will motivate the placing of the “Helena” as “Achse” at the center of *Faust II*), is not to minimize Faust’s *readiness* to undergo a dangerous adventure: Faust is certainly awed by the name of the Mothers, and he clearly summons up the courage to face a vague and frightening Unknown. Perhaps the most obvious evidence that Faust’s subjective courage is disproportionate to any probable danger to himself is to be found in the fact that he experiences a feeling of hypnotic awe only when Mephisto

has just mentioned the Mothers by name – not when Mephisto describes in awesome language the desolate solitude in which the Mothers dwell. Their name is first mentioned in line 6215, but by the end of Mephisto's "Kein Weg! Ins Unbetretene" speech (6222-7), Faust is again ready to doubt the meaningfulness of what Mephisto is asserting (hence "Hier wittert's nach der Hexenküche" [6229] and "Du sprichst als erster aller Mystagogen" [6249]). If Faust nonetheless agrees to pull Mephisto's chestnuts out of the fire for him, he does so largely in the spirit of contradiction: "Nur immer zu! wir wollen es ergründen, / In deinem Nichts hoff' ich das All zu finden" (6256-7). It is only when Mephisto again mentions the Mothers by name (6264) that Faust again assumes a serious, unsceptical tone; but now he has taken the magic key into his hand, is in direct physical rapport with Mephistophelean supernatural-magical forces, and is in any case already committed to his adventure by his earlier "Nur immer zu!" Only at this point, when he has already compromised himself by undertaking to use magic to satisfy the Emperor's ignoble lust for novel amusement, does Faust speak of what he is about to do as a "großes Werk" (6282). And the very fact that he now becomes obviously theatrical – strikes, contrary to his wont throughout the whole of *Faust*, what is specifically described as "eine entschieden gebietende Attitüde mit dem Schlüssel" (6293) – would indicate that he is paying the price of degradation which he regularly pays for the use of magic in the course of his long dramatic career.

Actual analysis of Mephisto's description of the Realm of the Mothers confirms the supposition that the scene "Finstere Galerie" is comic even more than it is serious. Its comedy is not, of course, of the obvious, grotesque kind that characterizes "Hexenküche," nor is it as unsubtle as that of the mass-suggestion episode which concludes "Kaiserliche Pfalz: Saal des Thrones." The comedy is, however, that of mystagogic delusion, and it is very high comedy because the victim of suggestion is a highly intelligent and unusually sceptical subject. Traditional assertions to the contrary, there is certainly hocuspocus in the use of a magical key and a trapdoor descent in the course of "Finstere Galerie." If, on the other hand, there is no pure nonsense of the "Hexeneinmaleins" variety, that is only because the uncreative Mephistopheles constructs the awesome Void of the Realm of the Mothers as he goes along, meeting Faust's criticisms and objections, and developing suggestions which actually come from Faust himself. The Realm of the Mothers is a brilliant extemporisation which Faust fails to recognize as such because the extemporiser unbalances him emotionally by mentioning the Mothers whenever his sceptical faculties seem to be about to make him lose patience with further extemporisation.²

² It is a matter of indifference to this discussion whether Faust is being audaciously reminded by Mephistopheles of his crimes against the mother of his child and her mother, or whether, as Bruns, page 373, suggests, he is moved by disturbing associations connected with his own experiences as a son.

It is not necessary to credit Mephisto with diabolical omniscience in order to explain the Realm of the Mothers, at least on a psychological dramatic level, as an extension of Faust's own thoughts or elaboration of his own ideas, although Mephistophelean omniscience of what goes on in Faust's mind is a basic assumption of the legend upon which Goethe is elaborating and a regular condition of the development of the dramatic action of *Faust* up to this point and on after it.³ While Mephisto is still inventing implausible reasons for not fulfilling Faust's request for help – implausible both because in earlier versions of the legend help is forthcoming and because in the course of both Classical Walpurgisnight and "Helena" he occasionally lets slip remarks that show considerable familiarity with classical antiquity (cf. 6979 f., 7080 ff., 7714 ff., 8813-78, etc.) – Faust significantly declares:

Bei dir gerät man stets ins Ungewisse,
Der Vater bist du aller Hindernisse,
Für jedes Mittel willst du neuen Lohn.

Although Mephisto continues to protest – "Das Heidenvolk geht mich nichts an" – he concedes, with a "Doch" (6211), that there is a "Mittel" after all. And it is only at this point that he begins to introduce the Mothers in a passage which well represents "das Ungewisse" in an extreme form. For he presents goddesses of whose existence he frankly acknowledges there are no (mortal) witnesses ("ungekannt / Euch Sterblichen") and who dwell in a timeless Void. May there not be ironic frankness in the ambiguous "Von ihnen sprechen ist Verlegenheit," i. e., genuine

³ Mephisto's remarks in "Prolog im Himmel," his complete dossier on Gretchen when he has just countered "du mußt mir die Dirne schaffen" with a "Nun, welche?" and his preparation of Faust's appearance at the imperial court – when we do not yet know how Faust envisions "das höchste Dasein" – may be regarded as sufficient examples of such omniscience, the last instance of which is the most important dramatically if the action of *Faust II* is not to seem less "plausibly" motivated than that of *Faust I*. One later example of omniscience is Mephisto's entrance in "Innerer Burghof" with a speech ("Buchstabiert in Liebesfibern . . .") that directly parodies the Calderonesque manner of Faust's and Helena's baroque-romantic rhyme play. – One corollary of this assumption of Mephistophelean omniscience might be that he knows that Faust is still disturbed deep within by "des Vorwurfs glühend bittre Pfeile," is to be knocked off his guard by an allusion to Mothers because Faust subconsciously regards himself as guilty of Gretchen's and her mother's deaths. Another might be that he realizes Faust's intense current interest in poetry (the "Schöpfungsgenuß von innen" whose first outlet has been the allegorical masquerade and whose next will be the *Raub der Helena*) and so is simply mocking with a "praise of Nothingness" Faust's quasi-religious, *Deutsche-Klassik* faith in the vital significance of aesthetic creation, or at least his faith in the creative power of the human spirit that can somehow make something where nothing existed before, despite the old saw that nothing can be made from Nothing. (This second corollary would not represent a reading back from the "Rittersaal" variant "Dichter" [for "Magier"] in the manner of B. von Wiese, who in his *Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel* [Hamburg, 1948, I, 179] declares: "Mit der Mütterszene betreten wir Faustische Welt als 'Schöpfungsgenuß von innen'." It is, rather, a reading on from the final words of Faust-Plutus' farewell to the Boy Charioteer, ending "Dorthin, wo Schönes, Gutes nur gefällt, / Zur Einsamkeit! – da schaffe deine Welt.")

embarrassment at having to improvise in order not to be caught openly in lies by a Faust whose sound knowledge of the Devil's powers has already once been demonstrated in the first scene "Studierzimmer"?

When, under the spell of "Mütter," Faust almost automatically asks "Wohin der Weg?" his informant is content to describe *no* way ("Kein Weg! Ins Unbetretene, / Nicht zu Betretende; ein Weg ans Unerbetene, / Nicht zu Erbittende") and then to ask if Faust is ready to go this "no way" which is barred by no locks or bolts. But a pure "nowhere" is hard to keep inventing, even for a spirit of negation, and so Mephisto compromises by temporarily substituting "Öd' und Einsamkeit" for a pure Void — but not without the impertinence appropriate to a master of suggestive mystification (hence the question "Hast du Begriff von . . ." directed to a Faust, one of whose most memorable earlier scenes was "Wald und Höhle," who has more recently represented the "pure" poet Boy Charioteer as best able to create in "Einsamkeit"). Angered, Faust repudiates the imputation that he has not known solitude, even asserting that he had on occasion fled to it even before his meeting with Mephisto because he could not endure "Das Leere lernen, Leeres lehren." Now Mephistopheles develops the concepts of "emptiness" with Schillerian poetic vigor (cf. the general eighteenth-century poetic fascination with the then newly popularized scientific and mathematical concepts of immensity and infinity), but he momentarily relinquishes any effort to describe a pure Void as such, contenting himself with a picture of a limitless ocean before once again returning to the theme of Mephistophelean nothingness. When Faust becomes angry and denies that there can be absolute Nothingness (hence the challenging "In deinem Nichts hoff' ich das All zu finden"), Mephisto forces — at least in the prestidigitator's sense of the verb — the magic key into his hand.

Faust's resistance begins to weaken, and Mephistopheles immediately begins to fill his Void with objects, now turning it into "der Gebilde losgebundene Reiche" and making it, as Bruns rightly insists, into a storehouse of things past and gone ("das nicht mehr Vorhandene" — 6278). When the magic of the key makes Faust feel "neue Stärke" — is this pure suggestion? — Mephisto boldly introduces concrete objects such as a tripod and an "allertiefster Grund" on which the Mothers must be imagined as sitting, standing and walking (6286). What but a moment before was simply a realm of something like Platonic ideas of things past now becomes a realm of "Gestaltung, Umgestaltung," which seems to be a concession to Faust's refusal (6271) to seek his salvation in the merely static ("im Erstarren"). The rest of the scene shows Faust striking his unnatural "Attitüde" and ends with Mephisto's coolly ironic remarks already cited above.

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The connection between the Mothers and the Phorcides and Cabiri does not derive solely from the scene "Finstere Galerie," although there

the several Mothers — clearly more than three (cf. 6286) — suggest blindfolded or eyeless priestesses who stare into the Unknown, into the realm of abstract and invisible “Schemen” and so offer a vague parallel to the almost eyeless Phorcides with one eye among all three. The connection, especially that with the Cabiri, results more from the fact that in “Rittersaal” the Mothers are metamorphosed by Faust, playing the rôle of “Wundermann” (6421) with theatrical grandiloquence (6426: “großartig”), from goddesses of timeless eternals into fate-like powers actually capable of giving and taking away life (“Ihr verteilt zum Zelt des Tages, zum Gewölb’ der Nächte, was einmal war”). As Fates they suggest a trinity (cf. Moira, Parcae, Norns, all most frequently represented as trinities); although this is not explicitly stated, yet certainly the physical introduction of a tripod from below the stage also suggests an apparatus, at the three sides of which three beings have sat. What seems to me most important, however, is that they are no longer representatives of absolute isolation: Faust corrects his “die ihr . . . ewig einsam wohnt” by adding “und doch gesellig!” It is as if Faust, tricked into nonsense by Mephistopheles, is compelled to make the nonsense somewhat more plausible than it was originally and therefore adapts it, himself now extemporising, to the magic pantomime which he feels constrained to produce. Only when he falls under the spell of Helena’s beauty does he again become irrational, take his ordeal seriously, confuse theatrical or magical illusion with realities (6553), and invoke the Mothers seriously. In vain, of course, since they were insubstantial extensions of Mephistophelean Nothingness from the moment that they first were mentioned!

The Phorcides (7969-8033) or Graeae of the Classical Walpurgis-night are the Norn-like, weird sisters of the Parcae, as Mephisto explicitly states in the first speech which he addresses to them. They themselves emphasize the fact that they live “Versenkt in Einsamkeit und stillste Nacht,” which further strengthens the parallel between themselves and the Mothers. But if in their half visibility — it is a Walpurgis Night and they are in a dimly illuminated cave at that (7965-6) — they are less remote from us than the purely hypothetical and, in Goethe’s day, still obscure Mothers, they are in one way more remarkable: they are “Beinah’ uns selbst, ganz allen unbekannt.” This may be nonsense, since anyone who knows the story of Perseus and Medusa has heard of them, but it is certainly an even more outrageous supposition as stated than Mephisto’s characterization of the Mothers as “Göttinnen, ungekannt / Euch Sterblichen, von uns nicht gern genannt.” That it is nonsense seems also to be emphasized by another reminder of “Hexenküche” now introduced — Mephisto’s “Da ging’ es wohl auch mythologisch an, / In zwei die Wesenheit der drei zu fassen,” which is an ironic allusion to trinitarianism matched only by his words then: “Denn ein vollkommener Widerspruch / Bleibt gleich geheimnisvoll für Kluge wie für Toren.

... Es war die Art zu allen Zeiten, / Durch Drei und Eins, und Eins und Drei / Irrtum statt Wahrheit zu verbreiten" (2557 ff.).

In the light of logic, at least, the poetic aura of the Realm of the Mothers becomes very largely a "Widerspruch," an antilogy, even as do some of the things which the Phorcides have been quoted as saying about themselves. But instead of letting the atmosphere of awe dominate in this episode of the Classical Walpurgisnight, Goethe has emphasized the comic side of poetic supernaturalism and cast doubt, for those who have not yet seen its negative implications, upon the absolute seriousness of "Finstere Galerie." The humorous side of unknown deities is not yet an exhausted theme in *Faust*, however, and a few acting minutes later (after thirty lines of text: 8064 ff.) the Nereids and Tritons exit to fetch the Cabiri of Samothrace, and the Sirens wonderingly ask:

Was denken sie zu vollführen
Im Reiche der hohen Kabiren?
Sind Götter! Wundersam eigen,
Die sich immerfort selbst erzeugen
Und niemals wissen, was sie sind.

Even if we did not know of the strange fantasies which Romantic mythologists fabricated on the subject of the significance of the Cabiri in the early years of the nineteenth century, we would still recognize in the Sirens' characterization of the Cabiri something contradictory which must remain "gleich geheimnisvoll für Kluge wie für Toren." The Cabiri are the last variation on the theme, potentially either serious or comic, of mysterious deities. When they are triumphantly brought in — conveniently concealed from view in a giant tortoise shell — they are identified as simultaneously great and small ("Klein von Gestalt, / Groß von Gewalt"). A trinity of them is present (8186), but now the pattern "Finstere Galerie" — "Rittersaal" is reversed and a trinity quickly metamorphoses into several more deities as the dialogue begins to echo, not too faintly, the numerological nonsense of the "Hexeneinmaleins" and culminates in the revelation that what for a while seems to be a septad is really an octet whose last member no one has ever thought of before:

Nereiden ... Drei haben wir mitgenommen,
Der vierte wollte nicht kommen,
Er sagte, er sei der Rechte,
Der für sie alle dächte. ...
Sind eigentlich ihrer sieben.

Sirenen Wo sind die drei geblieben?
Nereiden ... Wir wüßten's nicht zu sagen,
Sind im Olymp zu erfragen;
Dort wes't auch wohl der achte,
An den noch niemand dachte.

Although the Cabiri are the least awesome members of the series "Mothers-Phorcides-Cabiri" (hence Homunculus' observation: "Die Ungestalten seh' ich an / Als irden-schlechte Töpfe" — 8219 f.), in large

part because they simply furnish occasion for the Nereids and Tritons to demonstrate to themselves that they are more than mere fishes (8069), i. e., to satisfy their human pride—

Nereiden . . . Wie unser Ruhm zum höchsten prangt,
Dieses Fest anzuführen!

Sirenen Die Helden des Altertums
Ermangeln des Ruhms,
Wo und wie er auch prangt,
Wenn sie das goldne Vließ erlangt,
Ihr die Kabiren.

(Wiederholt als Allgesang.)
Wenn sie das goldne Vließ erlangt,

Wir! } die Kabiren.
Ihr! }

— the episode of the Cabiri may perhaps nevertheless be regarded as that series' most important member. For the all-too-human pride of the Nereids and Tritons at last places the thrice-introduced motif of mysterious deities in a context which, by virtue of its patently humanistic tone, endows the motif with a universal human significance instead of with a primarily esoteric and intellectual (the Mothers) or with a primarily negative and fantastic one (the Phorcides) only. However comic the Schellingesque formulation "Sehnsuchtsvolle Hungerleider / Nach dem Unerreichlichen" may be as a description of the supposed nature of these obscure divinities, it does endow them with fundamental traits of Faust's and Man's nature as this has been repeatedly revealed and described in the course of the drama. The descent to the Mothers is a path of error demanded by the action of *Faust II* if the "Helena" is to be in any measure dramatically motivated. Mephistopheles' encounter with the Phorcides is frankly fortuitous, but it also serves a purpose: to provide a classical disguise for Faust's antagonist in the same "Helena." Only the Cabiri are introduced without teleological considerations — except that they serve to counteract any lasting "transcendental" spell which the scene "Finstere Galerie" might otherwise continue to cast in a work whose hero in his moment of greatest insight and courage boldly declares: "Nach drüben ist die Aussicht uns verrannt; / Tor, wer dorthin die Augen blinzelnd richtet, / Sich über Wolken seinesgleichen dichtet!" (11442-4) — and so, misshapen and unmysterious as they finally prove to be, they alone of these three groups are positive symbols of the human power to grow and aspire first defined in "Vorspiel auf dem Theater" ("Wer fertig ist, dem ist nichts recht zu machen; / Ein Werdender wird immer dankbar sein" — 182 f.) and repeatedly acclaimed even unto the concluding lines of *Faust*, where the Chorus mysticus sings its supreme symbol, "Das Ewig-Weibliche."

GOTTSCHED VERSUS THE OPERA

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For practical purposes, systematic operatic criticism started in Germany with Gottsched. We know of only two treatises on opera prior to Gottsched (v. Höveln, 1660, and B. Feind, 1708), but these made no impression. However, the imprint of Gottsched's personality and thought upon at least two generations was such that the fate and form of opera in Germany was partially decreed by the would-be dictator of Leipzig.

This vacuum of German operatic criticism surrounding Gottsched already conditions his attitudes: there was no predetermined native yardstick by which to judge opera, nor was there any established tradition in criticism. By force of circumstances the pioneer critic had to be completely original or import his standards from France, England, and Italy. The former is unlikely in any age, the latter became the fact. In a country whose philosophy and politics lay in the shadow of France, it was natural that the neo-classical French standards should be applied to the infant craft of literary criticism, of which, contrary to our modern categorization, operatic criticism was a branch.

Nineteenth century literary historians and editors have mainly attributed Gottsched's violent dislike for opera to what they called his prosaic, unmusical nature (Cf. DNL, XLII, xlv). That this is based on false assumptions has frequently been demonstrated.¹ Gottsched himself wrote his rebuttal in 1734: "Ich gebe mich für keinen Feind der Musik aus, höre vielmehr sehr gern gute Stimmen singen und allerley Instrumente spielen."² He admitted that he could neither play an instrument nor sing (*ibid.*, 608), but apparently his wife was a capable performer, and he himself joined forces with musicians many times in the production of odes and cantatas, and even collaborated at least twice with Johann Sebastian Bach,³ whom he is said not to have noticed in his own home town.

Gottsched's operatic criticism is not a one-thrust affair, but extends over a period of 33 years, from 1728 to 1761. He delivered his opening blast in his moral weekly *Der Biedermann* in 1728, followed by a reiteration and expansion in the last chapter of his *Versuch einer Kritischen*

¹ Cf. Arnold Schering, *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs*, vol. III: *Das Zeitalter Joh. Seb. Bachs und Joh. Adam Hillers (1723-1800)* (Leipzig, 1941), 317.

² Johann Christoph Gottsched, "Des Herrn Joh. Fr. von Uffenbach gesammelte Nebenarbeit in gebundenen Reden (1733)," review and answer in *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der deutschen Sprache, Beredsamkeit und Poesie*, III (1734), 609 f.

³ Wolfgang Schmieder, *Thematisch-Systematisches Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke von Johann Sebastian Bach* (Leipzig, 1950), 259: "Trauerode auf das Ableben der Gemahlin Augusts des Starken," composed October 17, 1727, text by Gottsched; 614: "Huldigungskantate," composed April 28, 1738, text by Gottsched, music no longer extant.

Dichtkunst in 1730, where he gradually solidifies his position by citing more and more foreign authorities with each new edition, the fourth of which appeared in 1751.⁴ This codification of his ideas led to two literary challenges by Ludwig Friedrich Hudemann and Johann Friedrich von Uffenbach, which he parried in print in 1733 and 1734. In addition he wrote an essay *Von dem Bathos in den Opern* in 1734, followed by minor splinters of criticism in two of his periodicals, *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der deutschen Sprache, Beredsamkeit und Poesie* (1732-1743) and *Das Neueste aus der ammuthigen Gelehrsamkeit* (1751-1761). Beside this he translated foreign works dealing with opera which were either his sources or expressed his viewpoint, such as St. Evremond's satirical drama *Les Opéras*, a chapter dealing with opera from Muratori's *Della perfetta Poesia*, and extracted portions from Batteux's *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un Seul Principe* as well as Melchior Grimm's *Lettre sur Omphale*. He neglected to introduce his German readers to any work which lavished outright praise upon opera, such as the essays of Ragenet or Malcolm, nor does he make reference to Marcello's *Le Teatro a la Mode*, which might have been powerful ammunition for his attack.

The extent of Gottsched's acquaintance with actual opera performances cannot be estimated exactly. As far as is known, no opera was performed in Leipzig between 1720 and 1744. The leading musician of Leipzig during Gottsched's prime, Johann Sebastian Bach, did not write any operas. In the spring of 1728, however, Gottsched went to Dresden and visited in the home of J. U. König, court poet in Saxony and author of numerous operatic libretti. Since the first attacks on opera appeared late in 1728, we may assume that Gottsched was exposed to the Italian opera then reigning in Dresden. From what is known of the performances in the Saxon capital, a rationalist, trained in the tradition of Leibniz and Wolff, would react to those spectacles just as Gottsched did.

The course of Gottsched's operatic criticism is like an extended decrescendo: it opens with the severest thunder in 1728 and decreases in vehemence as time goes on. The substance of his attack is already contained in *Der Biedermann*, and can be characterized by a few quotations:

"Fragt man mich: Was eine Oper ist? so kann ich nicht besser, als mit dem gelehrten und galanten St. Evremond. . . antworten: sie sey ein ungereimter Mischmasch von Poesie und Musik, wo der Dichter und Komponist einander Gewalt tun, und sich überaus viel Mühe geben, ein sehr elendes Werk zu Stande zu bringen."

"Eine unverschämte Poesie, entzückende Musik, blendende Pracht der Schaubühne, freche Kleidung und unzüchtige Stellung der spielenden Personen vereinigen alle ihre Kräfte mit einander, um einem schwachen Zuhörer die schädlichste Gemütsneigung, ich meine die Wollust, rege zu machen."

⁴ Citations from the *Kritische Dichtkunst* are to the fourth edition (Leipzig, 1751).

"Unsere Opern haben alles miteinander musikalisch gemacht. Die Personen müssen nach Noten lachen und weinen, husten und schnupfen. Niemand untersteht sich dem andern einen guten Morgen zu bieten, ohne den Takt zu schlagen. Und die zornigste Person sieht sich genötigt, so lange auf die Zunge zu beißen, bis ihr Widersacher seine Triller ausgeschlagen. . . ."

"Man muß seinen Verstand entweder zu Hause lassen, und nur die Ohren mitbringen, wenn man in die Oper geht; oder man muß sich Gewalt antun, und alle Unmöglichkeiten, die uns darin vorgestellt werden, verdauen können."

And as a capstone, he writes:

"Die Opern sind weder musikalische Tragödien noch musikalische Komödien zu nennen. Sie tun der Republik so viel Schaden, als jene ihr Nutzen bringen, wenn sie nur unter der Aufsicht verständiger Leute gespielt werden. Sie sollten als von rechtswegen gar nicht geduldet werden."⁵

His attack thus is based on four main points: Opera is unreasonable nonsense, and others say so too; it incites immorality and appeals solely to the senses; it is unnatural in that it does not have its model in nature; and lastly it does not fit into the established categories of poetry, and should be therefore be banned as dangerous.

The opera chapter of the *Kritische Dichtkunst* really only adds details to these main arguments. Gottsched stresses the fact that he considers through-composed singing as contrary to all reason, that opera does not instruct but only entertains, that the machines of opera interrupt any semblance of "vraisemblance" and the imitation of nature, which, in the doctrine of the French neo-classicists, is the basis of all arts. Courtly life was to Gottsched the model of tragedy, the life in the cities was the model of comedy. But where, we hear in refrain, is the natural model of opera? "Wenn wir eine Oper in ihrem Zusammenhang ansehen, so müssen wir uns einbilden, wir wären in einer andern Welt: so gar unnatürlich ist alles" (*Kritische Dichtkunst*, 739). Then he expands on the coughing and crying to music. From a Wolffian, this was a stinging indictment. To a man who believed that he lived in "the best of all possible worlds" anything that belonged to another world had to be inferior. Opera, this Gottsched recognized correctly, is not an image of our real world, but a reflection of our dream world, a fact which made that form so attractive to the later generation of romanticists.

At this stage, then, Gottsched saw in opera a form basically alien to his way of thinking, and with good reason, for opera, or music-drama, as we know it, does not fit into the scheme which assigns to all art a narrow naturalism with the specific task of representing the desirable realities of life. The twentieth century demands more from art: a symbol-

⁵ Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Der Biedermann*, reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften von Johann Christoph Gottsched*, ed. Eugen Reichel (Berlin, n. d.), vol. III and IV; IV, 219, 174, 227, 223 f., 222 f.

ization of the unconscious in concurrence and conflict with the real. We fail to understand Gottsched as soon as we expect romantic or imaginative attitudes from him. We can only judge his criticism as a manifestation of rationalistic naturalism in the prerousseauistic mode.

In addition Gottsched denounces a number of grievous misuses, echoing the critiques of St. Evremond, Muratori, and, if he was familiar with his work, Marcello: The repetition of words, the use of two or more languages on the stage in the same work, the covering-up of the text by the music, the extravagant use of machines, and the low moral reputation of all those associated with operas. He insists on the application of the three unities and on the moral purposes of stage presentations.

Besides those already enunciated in *Der Biedermann*, the *Kritische Dichtkunst* does add one all-important argument: the hegemony of poetry over all other arts with which it might be combined. Speaking of the rules governing the writing of cantatas, Gottsched says: "Sowohl von Arien als Recitativen haben uns viele . . . eine Menge von Regeln gegeben . . . Alle laufen dahinaus, daß der Poet ein Sklave des Komponisten sein und nicht denken oder sagen müsse wie oder was er wolle . . . Alle diese Regeln haben die Herrn Musici den Poeten vorgeschrieben, und diese haben sich dieselben, ich weiß nicht warum? vorschreiben lassen, ja sie wohl gar angebetet. Allein wie wäre es, wenn ein Poet seinem Komponisten einmal nach Anleitung der Natur und Vernunft sagte, wie er seine Kantaten setzen sollte" (*Kritische Dichtkunst*, 720 f.). Gottsched was the first German critic to delineate this perennial problem of the poet-composer relationship clearly. For him this point represented one of the remediable aspects of opera, and he wrote again in a review of a book by Giambattista Pasquali in 1756: "In der neuen Opernrepublik soll, nach des Verfassers Absicht, der Poet den obersten, der Tonkünstler den zweiten Platz haben. Die Spielleute, die Tänzer und Maler, müßten sich lenken lassen, und sich nach den Gedanken und Absichten der beiden ersten bequemen; die den ganzen Sinn des Schauspiels im Kopfe haben. Nichts ist vernünftiger, als das."⁶

This basic attitude, so vital in later generations, originates here from the view that opera is nothing but a form of tragedy.⁷ Gottsched treats opera as a play whose text he studies, without taking the music actually into consideration. He fails to realize that the libretto is not an independent whole but only an integral part of a larger entity.

In *Der Biedermann*, Gottsched already holds up the drama and its rules as dogma for opera. Five years later he is willing to admit that he saw an Italian opera in Dresden, called *Cajus Fabritius*, in which the characters were good, which means moral and instructive. If the unity

⁶ Johann Christoph Gottsched, "Discorsi sopra differenti soggetti, in Venezia 1755, presso Giam Battista Pasquali," extracts and review in *Das Neueste aus der amnuthigen Gelehrsamkeit*, VI (1756), 374.

⁷ Theodor Wilhelm Danzel, *Gottsched und seine Zeit* (Leipzig, 1848), 128 f.

of place and the interconnection of scenes were just more carefully observed, he feels, he might almost find nothing to criticize, other than that it is an opera! "Eine so schöne Arbeit hätte nicht gesungen werden dürfen, um zu gefallen. Ja sie würde mehr Nachdruck in Bewegung der Gemüther gehabt haben, wenn sie als ein Trauerspiel wäre aufgeführt worden" (*Answer to Uffenbach*, 628 f.).

The crux of the problem is crystallized in a note in Gottsched's extract of Batteux in 1754: "Die Poesie einer Oper bleibt ein Schauspiel, welches seinen vollkommenen Verstand hat, seine Gesinnungen, Empfindungen und Leidenschaften erregt, kurz, welches Leser und Zuschauer vergnügt, befriediget und rühret, wenn es gleich ohne Musik aufgeführt wird. . . . Der Poet arbeitet für sich, nach seinen eigenen Regeln und wenn er fertig ist, so kommt der Komponist und suchet durch seine Noten die Gedanken desselben noch zu erhöhen und zu verstärken."⁸ It is noteworthy that Metastasio, the most successful librettist of the time, shared this view emphatically. Lorenz Mizler, music critic and journalist in Leipzig and a student of Gottsched, rephrased this opinion in his commentary to Hudemann's critique of Gottsched: "Eine Oper kann nicht mehr werden, als ein gutes in Musik gebrachtes Trauer oder Lustspiel, wenn sie auch ohne Fehler ist. Die damit verknüpfte Musik kann sie wohl bei Musikverständigen annehmlich machen, wenn sie mit den Worten übereinstimmt, schwerlich aber wird wohl dadurch die Fabel und Ausführung derselben besser, wohl aber schlimmer, wenn ein ungeschickter Komponist darüber kommt."⁹ Gottsched and his followers would have fought men like Verdi, who left almost only the versification up to his librettists, ordered the plots he wanted and made a hack out of the poet.

This fundamental misconception of the nature of opera is already a basic reason why Gottsched rejected opera. That art form will not be judged as drama alone, it requires music to complete it. But we may cite other reasons for Gottsched's opposition.

No German language stage existed at that time which was capable of attracting the upper classes. The courts, as centers of culture, fostered French comedy or Italian opera. The former could readily be translated. But, as any American opera lover knows, translation of a well-entrenched foreign-language opera has a hard struggle with the managers, the singers and the public, even if good translations are available. Since it was one of Gottsched's avowed aims to reform the German stage and to mold it into an instrument of national education and culture, he had to face the competition of opera. These contending forces cannot be underestimated. The literary historian too readily forgets the role of opera, and the

⁸ Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Auszug aus des Herrn Batteux Schönen Künsten aus dem einzigen Grundsatz der Nachahmung bergeleitet* (Leipzig, 1754), 214 f., as cited in Ernst Mollenhauer, *St. Evremont als Kritiker* (Diss., Greifswald, 1914), 86 f.

⁹ Lorenz Mizler, *Musikalische Bibliothek*, vol. II, part III (Leipzig, 1743), 128.

musicologist is prone to ignore the dramatic stage. In the eighteenth century both opera and drama too frequently spoke from the same stage to allow a reformer of the drama to ignore opera. We only have to recall Goethe's difficulties as a theater manager. On the most progressive stage in all Germany, with some of the finest dramatic literature ever written in German at his disposal, Goethe had to wrestle with opera and its performers and proponents for drama's rights.

There are other, related reasons for Gottsched's attack on opera. It seems that the stage as a whole was at that time under sharp attack from the clergy as a breeding place of poor morals. The adherents of German drama had to feel that these accusations, whether just or not, were not meant entirely against them, but chiefly against opera, that, however, all stage presentations were being implicated. Their defense was therefore an attempt to deflect the moral charges toward opera.

Furthermore, in his meritorious zeal to establish standards for poetry, Gottsched adopted the pseudo-Aristotelean rules, including the three unities, and the concept of the imitation of nature. Opera did not follow "the rules," ergo, it was bad. Besides, opera furnished the framework for many a gruesome pastepot tragedy, at a time when there were few novels to dramatize; Gottsched attacked these monstrosities at their source, in opera. Since practically all opera, aside from the notable stage in Hamburg, where Keiser, Händel, and Telemann had produced German operas for several decades, was in Italian, opera ran counter to Gottsched's endeavors for the purification of the German language.

In addition, we must remember Gottsched's position straddling two cultural periods. Examined within the framework of the changing tastes in his times, Gottsched was judging a Baroque form with the standards of rationalism, evaluating opera in a context different from the one for which it was created. The three unities meant little to the Baroque composer, and melismatic figures were unreasonable to a poet of the Enlightenment.

Gottsched's attack on opera can thus be explained readily — as long as one does not consider anything he wrote later than 1730. After that date, it appears he changed his mind somewhat, and was most reluctant to admit it. A contemporary interpretation of Gottsched's opposition to opera, contained in a footnote to Hudemann's critique of Gottsched's operatic views, may offer a clue to his true purposes. Lorenz Mizler appended this note to a reprint of Hudemann's essay: "Es scheint als wenn der Herr Verfasser hier seinem Gegner (Gottsched) zu viel zumuthet, wenn er meint, es habe solcher die Oper an und vor sich das ungereimteste Werk genennet, so jemals der menschliche Verstand ersonnen. Da aber solcher die größten Fehler der Opern erst erzählt, und denn darauf gesagt, es sei das ungereimteste Werk, so ist wohl gewiß, daß er die wohl gesetzten Opern nicht, sondern nur die Fehlerhaften

darunter verstehe, und daß er die wohlgesetzten Opern, wie der Herr D. Hudemann, vor nichts ungereimtes ansehe" (Mizler, *Bibliothek*, vol. II, part III, 123).

No modern critic of Gottsched seems to share that view. On the face of it Gottsched certainly condemns opera completely. However, as the comment of a reasonable and respected contemporary, Mizler's statement bears investigation. It is certainly conceivable that Mizler, as a student and friend of Gottsched, knew more about his master's actual goals than modern scholarship can deduce from just reading his works and the few extant letters. The footnote just quoted was printed in 1743, fifteen years after Gottsched's original blast at opera. Gustav Waniek, in his standard biography of Gottsched,¹⁰ as well as Hugo Goldschmidt in his *Musikaesthetik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1915, 274 f.), speak of the fact that Gottsched altered his attitude toward opera in his later years. We must also remember the little known fact that Gottsched himself once wrote a Singspiel, *Die verliebte Diana*, a deed for which his adversaries castigated him severely and chided him for inconsistency (Danzel, 121). If Mizler's view is correct and Gottsched is only reaching for the extremes of polemic to aid in a reform of opera, we would certainly have to amend our estimate of Gottsched's position on the opera question.

The change from attack to reform is first evident in Gottsched's strangely polite answer to Uffenbach's critique of the *Kritische Dichtkunst* in 1734. Discussing the machines in opera, Gottsched writes: "Wenn die Einrichtung aller dieser prächtigen Dinge der Wahrscheinlichkeit gemäß gebraucht wird: So entsteht allerdings was vortreffliches daraus. Man mache also die Oper nur erst in allem übrigen Vernunft- und Naturgemäßig, so werden auch ihre Nebenwerke gut sein" (*Answer to Uffenbach*, 630). That is quite an admission from the man who six years earlier had demanded the banning of all opera. And in the same essay we read:

"Nur das ist bei der Vereinigung [von Poesie und Musik] zu bedauern, daß die Schönheit der einen, nämlich der Poesie, durch das ausschweifende Wesen der andern gemeiniglich so verstümmelt, ja ganz zu Grunde gerichtet wird: Da doch vielmehr eine der andern behülflich, und ihre Schönheit zu erheben beflissen sein sollte. Dieses ist mein Grundsatz, darauf ich alle meine Urteile von der Komposition poetischer Texte gründe Nur diejenigen können mir hier zuwider sein, die sich ein solch Verhältnis zwischen Poesie und Musik einbilden, als die alten Schullehrer zwischen der Philosophie und Theologie ausgedacht hatten. Da hieß es *Philosophia est ancilla Theologiae*; und so möchten auch einige Musikanten gern die Poesie zur Magd ihrer Tonkunst machen. Allein wenn man nicht beide vor Schwestern ansehen, und also gleiche Rechte wiederfahren lassen will: So wird man noch alle vernünftige Poeten böse machen, und sie be-

¹⁰ *Gottsched und die deutsche Litteratur seiner Zeit* (Leipzig, 1897), 302.

wegen die Musik als ein bloßes Sinnenwerk zu verachten; die Poesie hergegen, als eine Belustigung des Verstandes zu erheben" (*Ibid.*, 610).

Thus Gottsched affirms his belief in a reasonable coalescence of poetry and music, as long as music does not try to dominate the union. In his notes to extracts of Batteux's *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un Seul Principe* (1754), he further emphasizes the dependence of music upon the other arts: "Wenn es einmal gewiß ist, daß man ohne Absichten weder Musiken noch Tänze setzen soll, wie sich's für ein vernünftiges Wesen nicht anders gezieht, so muß auch alles, was man dazu braucht, als ein Mittel dienen, dieselbe Absicht zu befördern . . . — Eine Musik ohne Text und Tanz ist nur ein totes Ding, nur ein Körper ohne Geist. Warum? Man versteht oder errät es vielmehr nur halb, was gespielt wird, wenn nicht entweder Gebärden oder Worte dazu kommen, die das deutlicher erklären, was die Töne sagen sollen."¹¹ Eugen Reichel, whose devotion to Gottsched prompted a 1700 page biography, sees in these lines a prophecy of the coming of Richard Wagner.¹² Gottsched, the unimaginative rationalist, would hardly have allowed such psychic powers to be attributed to him. His statement is in keeping with the eighteenth century's dominant literary devotion to vocal music over instrumental music. The fact that he includes dance as a necessary complement to music does remind the modern reader of Wagner's triad of music, poetry, and dance. Statements of this type do indicate that Gottsched was willing to condone and admit opera as an art form without wishing to commit himself in print to a change of heart by averting the word "opera" in these connections.

Gottsched did not want to give the impression that his reasoning had ever led him to make an error in judgment, and therefore he does not fail to underscore references to his well documented stand on opera even while expressing his modified views. So we read in the last essay to be cited here, in a review of a group of *Singspiele*, printed in 1761:

"Wie wenig wir auf Singspiele überhaupt halten; zumal so, wie sie gemeiniglich wider alle Regeln einer gesunden Schaubühne zu laufen pflegen, ist vielleicht den meisten unsrer Leser bekannt. Wer es noch nicht weiß, kann in der kritischen Dichtkunst im II. Th., II. Absch., 4. Hst. die Ursachen davon finden. Wir sind aber darum keine Feinde der Musik, wenn sie auf eine vernünftige Art angewandt wird, der Dichtkunst mehr Stärke, mehr Rührendes und Bewegliches zu erteilen, als sie sonst haben würde. Hätten dieses die meisten Setzkünstler zum Zweck gehabt: so würden die Opern nicht ein so langweiliges, gedehntes, und bei aller seiner Kostbarkeit, zum Gähnen reizendes Schauspiel geworden sein. Doch dies ist meistens auch darum geschehen, weil man alle Opern in Deutschland und England, in

¹¹ Gottsched, *Auszug aus Batteux*, as cited in Eugen Reichel, "Gottsched und Johann Adolph Scheibe," *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musik-Gesellschaft*, II (1900-01), 667.

¹² Eugen Reichel, *Gottsched* (Berlin, 1908-12), II, 388.

der lieben wälschen Sprache abgefaßt und abgesungen hat: die der große Haufen der Zuschauer nicht besser verstanden, als ob sie arabisch oder chinesisches gewesen wären."¹³

Compared with Gottsched's earliest statements that opera should be banned altogether, this pronouncement represents a complete reversal. He still insists that he does not like *Singspiele*. This word had acquired a new meaning in the 1750's, with the appearance of Weiße's *Der Teufel ist los*, which Gottsched castigated with all his waning power. The *Singspiele* of Weiße and Hiller meant to Gottsched a throw-back to the Harlequin entertainment stage of the days prior to his supposed dramatic reforms; therefore his reference to his earlier stand in the *Kritische Dichtkunst*. The following phrases are then so much the more startling. In order to add something to poetry which that art does not possess by itself, music is to be made part of a larger work of art, as long as the combination follows reason. This implies that there are some composers of whom Gottsched approves, while "most of them" bore their audience, presumably due to the lack of reason in their compositions.

The closing sentence, however, is the most forward looking: If opera were only to be in the language of the audience, Gottsched could approve. This appears to be in contradiction to his attack upon the Weiße type of *Singspiel*, which was, after all, in German. Where *Singspiel* and opera were still synonymous terms in 1730, when the *Kritische Dichtkunst* first appeared, and are still synonymous in Wieland's work, for instance, and occasionally even with Goethe, Gottsched, perhaps inadvertently, is beginning to make a distinction here. Serious opera, he says in effect, can be reasonable, but it must be in the vernacular, otherwise the poetry cannot explain the music. Whereas he had gloated over the decline of German opera when he was at the height of his literary influence, he now pleads for German language opera, as it arose in Wieland's *Alceste*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Hoffmann's *Undine*, and finally Weber's *Freischütz*.

Music had improved considerably in Germany between 1730 and 1761, and Gottsched makes allowance for its changes. Examined with the musical development in mind, Gottsched appears to be attacking the prevalent *stile concertate* of the Italian opera, while advocating something close to the *stile recitativo*, on which the Florentine opera of 1600 was based, and in which the music followed the text in every possible detail. Unconsciously, perhaps, he was leading opera back to its sources, a way which actually was followed by every major operatic reform.

In his own lifetime Gottsched had encouraged one musician to attempt the task of writing a reasonable serious German opera. Johann Adolph Scheibe, the composer and music critic of the Gottsched circle, did write a *Thusnelda* libretto (1749), but the musician Scheibe never wrote the music to author Scheibe's verses. There is little doubt, however,

¹³ Johann Christoph Gottsched, "Sedekias, König der Juden, etc. Singspiele," review in *Das Neueste aus der amnuthigen Gelehrsamkeit*, XI (1761), 537 f.

that Scheibe's acquaintance with Gottsched materially contributed to the latter's change of heart on the subject of opera.

The forward-looking nature of Gottsched's late criticism of opera is thereby established. Reform, not destruction was his aim. It appears, however, that Gottsched's original denunciation of opera made much more of an impression upon his contemporaries and the following generations than his later positive criticism, since the latter coincided with the waning of his influence and the success of the varied attacks upon him, starting in 1740. The Gottsched presented in the modern literary handbooks is the author of the *Kritische Dichtkunst*. Although we have shown a number of statements from his late criticism which foreshadow theories held by others only much later, these almost went unnoticed, in their time and in the intervening years, since Gottsched was already beginning to undergo the transformation into an author that one reads about, but whose work itself one does not have to read, an attitude which appears widespread today. To seek information about the real effect of Gottsched's views upon subsequent operatic history, we must concentrate almost completely on the views expressed in the *Kritische Dichtkunst* and its allied essays.

Every author and would-be literateur of the period from 1730 to about 1750 had to come to grips with Gottsched's theory. He became a foil for many generations after him. Some writers, like Johann Elias Schlegel and a certain Zingg, the editor of the *Hamburger Correspondent*, became advocates of opera in disagreeing with some of Gottsched's statements. Every composer and amateur musician was exposed to his thought through the writings of Scheibe (*Kritischer Musikus*, 1737, 2nd ed. 1745), who was even quoted at length by Lessing in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. They learned from him that the Italianate opera was contrary to all good taste, "vraisemblance" and "bienséance," and that improvement of opera had to come from the side of poetry. His blind insistence on opera as a form of tragedy became the starting point of German eighteenth century operatic aesthetics, whose main preoccupation was to wrest control of opera from the composer and vest it in the poet. Gluck's statement that he wished to forget his musicianship during the act of composing opera could not have been applauded as widely, had Gottsched not firmly implanted the concept of the supreme necessity of good drama in opera. With his original, superficial negation of opera, containing the germs of reform ideas, Gottsched sowed the seed for the attempt to create music-drama rather than music-opera.

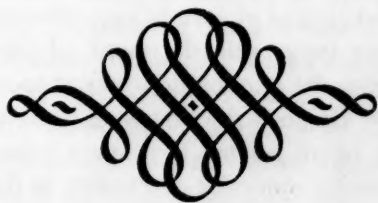
It is usually also forgotten that Gottsched's ideas on opera became one of the few literary exports of Germany at that time. A student of Gottsched's, Baron Melchior Grimm, famous for his part in the *Correspondence Littéraire*, wrote an essay in 1752 which contributed materially to the inception of the War of the Buffoons, by stressing what Gottsched

had always stressed: that music in opera must be permeated with the drama. Gottsched reviewed Grimm's *Lettre sur Omphale* in a tone that betrays his pleasure in his student's work.¹⁴

However, Gottsched's most important contribution to the history of opera in Germany was the fact that he was the first major literary figure to occupy himself with the problems of opera. The minor remarks by Harsdörffer, Christian Weise, and Barthhold Feind went almost unnoticed. In devoting considerable thought to a genre which was considered the province of the musicians at the time, he set an example for German literature to this day. Where Baroque opera was dominated by the music, the German opera of the late Enlightenment and Romanticism tended toward the music drama. Here is the starting point of serious literary thought on matters that touch on music. E. T. A. Hoffman, Richard Wagner, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, even Thomas Mann are hard to envision without an initial thinker who made it his business to include opera among the concerns of the men of letters. We cannot ignore the fact that the aesthetic development which leads to the operas of Wagner and Richard Strauss, the only German composers aside from the mainly Italian Mozart who hold the international operatic stage consistently today, is a literary development, which had its inception in Gottsched's mistaken notion that opera was a type of tragedy.

¹⁴ Johann Christoph Gottsched, "Lettre de M. Grimm sur Omphale," extracts and review in *Das Neueste aus der amnuthigen Gelehrsamkeit*, II (1752), 543-549.

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A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF GOTTFRIED BENN'S POEM "SPÄT"

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Simultaneously with the announcement in *Das Literarische Deutschland* (October 20, 1951) of Benn's being awarded the *Georg Büchner Preis*, one of Benn's most ambitious poems, "Spät," appeared for the first time. The three volumes of the poet's previous poems published since the war (*Trunkene Flut*, 1949; *Statische Gedichte*, 1949; *Fragmente*, 1951) reflect his nihilistic orientation. They expose the breakdown of European pseudo-idealistic creeds and the failure of modern man to cope with his environment. It seems appropriate and useful to consider "Spät" as evidence of Benn's poetic powers, since it marks both a recapitulation and an advance in the poet's work.

"Spät"¹ takes a special place in the whole work of the writer, not only for its unconcern with myth, intellectuality, and art (usually at the center of Benn's poetry), but also for its structural diversity and the extraordinary variety of styles.

As with many interpretations of modern poems, it is difficult to grasp parts of the poem until we have first roughly understood the whole of it. I shall, therefore, sketch at once what I believe the poem to be mainly about. "Spät" is a poem about the failure of certain key illusions, presented in a causative sequence in which various situations are developed, opening up broadly and finally focusing, with distinct dramatic force, on a personal vision of the essential quality of life. The first section deals with the close observation, broadly speaking, of an autumnal scene, behind which lie reminiscences of life and its great and unrelieved disillusionment. Section II goes back to trace certain illusions in childhood and youth, culminating in the futility of love. The third section reveals the wish to turn back, to live the moment, to erase the illusions, while developing the failure and the background of love in very detailed terms. In the next section, the fourth, we have again the motif of failure. Here the poet resorts to an image from the plutocratic strata of modern society typified in Hearst and Marion Davies — the end of a civilization with its superficiality and levelling of all values. We move from the generalized individual "I" to the specific objective correlative in the persons of Marion Davies and Hearst. In the fifth and sixth sections the personal experience, which stands for the common experience, is summed up, beginning with an open appeal to the reader to understand the essential quality of life and ending in a specific, somewhat surrealistic image of shadows walking

¹ The text of the poem is given at the end of this article. A translation of the poem, done by Cid Corman and Edgar Lohner, appeared in *NMQ* (Summer 1952), 180-83. Parts of the poem have been included in Benn's latest work *Die Stimme hinter dem Vorhang*.

out of life. The poem, therefore, might be called a disillusioned summing-up of the individual's failures in life and his realization of its futility in view of the inescapable fact of death; it is a dirge on the illusions of life and life's meaninglessness, expressed by the contemporary sensibility of an artist in whom a personal experience, seen in mature perspective, and a clear view of his time are one.

Actually much of this is intimated in the title. "Spät" is a highly suggestive term with a great many possible connotations. Mostly it refers to something much advanced in time (*späte Stunde, Spätherbst, späte Welt*, etc.). But often it suggests "in vain," or "too late," or "recent." Often, though not necessarily, it carries an overtone of either fulfilment or ripeness, of either regret or grief, and it sometimes suggests nearness to death. All these shades of meanings are drawn into the title of Benn's poem and thus hint at once at the essence of the poem as such. More than that, the title of "Spät"² has for Benn a kind of inexorable quality. It suggests, viewed from the whole of his work, the autumn of life, a lateness with an air of futility and a feeling of death; it implies the point of no return.

The poem opens leisurely and straightforwardly, in a natural flow, with the autumn image of a park, very much in the tone of either Stefan George's "Komm in den totgesagten park" or Rilke's "Herbstgedicht" (Herr, es ist Zeit . . .). Two pairs of modifiers (*alt, schwer*) are emphatically placed at the beginning and at the end (*feucht, verwirrt*) of the first stanza. They immediately pick up the theme of advanced time, which, along with the autumn image, is again taken up in the first line of the second stanza (*Herbstliche Süße*). This expression not only intensifies and narrows the vagueness of the park image, but also sums up the preceding stanza and serves as a transitional line leading to the more detailed scene that follows, in which the speaker of the poem (the ideal subject — not necessarily Benn) indulges in autumnal impressions of the Lüneburger Heath. It is late in the year and a scent of dying is in the air. The image of actual or approaching death, so distinct at the end of the poem, is already suggested here. The autumn image is now drawn in denser lines: the purple colors of heather that border the highway through which the speaker is clearly driving. While he drives along the heath, his awareness of the autumnal beauty of the scene merges with his reflections:

Versonnenheiten,³ die zu Nichts führen . . .

² "Spät" is a key word in the whole of the poet's work. It stands as a synonym for "modern," or "last" in the concept of his world. Rather early it occurs in his short stories and in two of his early essays (*Das letzte Ich*, 1920; *Das moderne Ich*, 1920). Among his poems we find such titles as "Ein später Blick," "Spät im Jahre," "Das späte Ich," etc.

³ The etymological meaning of this expression is likely to cast light on the theme as well. The word is derived from *versonnen*, i. e. to lose oneself in thought, so that the mind is focused in one direction only and loses its perceptibility for other things. Yet the poet, I believe, also plays on the light image. Admittedly, the verb "versonnen" (to make into a sun) has no immediate connection with the

Versommenheiten is the pivotal word in this stanza. In its ambiguity (the idea of thought and of light) it contains the turn from the objective to the reflective, from the description of landscape to the opening up of an all-absorbing, abysmal nothingness — a process that is strongly stressed four times ("zu Nichts führen," "in sich gekehrtes Kraut," "hinabbräunt," "ins Nieerblühte"), thus adding futility and disillusion to the theme of lateness. For this is, after all, the season that is supposed to be fruitful, and yet it is not.

The process of disillusionment, first experienced in nature, is repeated in the contrasted image of complex urban society. The shift is briefly indicated in the first two lines of the third stanza:

Dies die Natur.

Und durch die City . . .

The abrupt verbless brevity of the line makes us expect a shift. It also carries a slightly ironic concluding overtone suggesting: that's what nature really has to offer — nothing. The new image is again first depicted with an aura of pleasantness. The beertrucks move through the city. The play on *Bierwagen*, with the various overtones this word carries in German, first suggests an image of past gaiety, the friendly atmosphere of an older world, a past way of living. The pivotal word in this stanza is *Durst*. Its ambiguity, carrying meaning on two levels, the physical and the spiritual, is played on by the poet and is taken up and emphasized in the question "was stillt sich nicht?" *Bierwagen*, the symbol of a relaxed past and, at the same time, the symbol of an appeased and saturated society where masses wallow in excess, is the focal point of this image; it is immediately contrasted with the unappeased and intellectually restless "smaller circles," the distinguished individual who does not look for an easy way out and is not sunk in passivity.

The second section starts with the now familiar technical device of summing up in the first line of the first stanza in a tone of some finality what has been previously said:⁴

So enden die Blicke, die Blicke zurück.

From looking at the immediate environment the poet is prompted to turn back and reexamine his own past. His withdrawal into the world of early days brings forth in warm friendly images reminiscences of a harmonious obvious meaning of the word in this stanza. But the mere fact that Bann, who plays on word-roots (like every poet), chose as a keyword in this passage one that contains such suggestive ambiguities justifies the assumption that he was not only aware of these too, but most probably welcomed them — not as ambiguities, but as overtones of meaning.

⁴ A similar device has been noted in Mr. Jantz's article "Goethe's Lyric 'An den Mond': Its Structure and Unity" (*The German Quarterly*, January 1953), 26, in regard to stanzaic structure: "Goethe has a habit of composition which, when once observed, can be of great aid to the reader and interpreter of his poems: at the end of a stanza he frequently announces the theme or turn of the following stanza, sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly. He also uses this device . . . in his longer compositions." Obviously Bann's intensive study of Goethe has not been in vain.

childhood and the first disillusioning experiences in a vein of nostalgia;⁵ the second stanza concentrates on the disappointments of youth. Both stanzas are brief straightforward statements. Benn, with his syntactical originality, adds in the second stanza details which strengthen the thematic unity of the poem. It has here a staccato effect so that the reader is made painfully aware of the disillusionment carried through the syntax into the rhythm ("Begegnungen der Seele! Jugend! . . . Treubruch, Verfehlen, Verfall"). The third stanza again opens with an exclamation ("Und Liebe!"). Here the single instance is offered as dramatic evidence: the particular concrete experience against the more or less abstract statements in the first two stanzas. And as the stanza opens in more prose-like quotations, we find the versification freer: a long line, followed, as if in retraction, by a short line:

Ich glaube dir, daß du gern bei mir geblieben wärest,
aber es nicht konntest . . .

The line is thrown out and pulled back so that the reader gets the feeling of resigned disbelief. There is also youthful pathos, but the poet tries to make it deliberately objective. He tries to repress the feeling. This is quite typical of Benn, who often expresses an emotion freely and then represses it. He tries to give the impression that he is unconcerned, that he is cold and objective about life, while actually he is very much concerned. Finally, the meaninglessness of all these youthful sentiments is clinched in the passivity of the nature image:

So enden die Rosen,
Blatt um Blatt

which also resumes the image of fruitless vegetation and the "Versonnenheiten, die zu Nichts führen" of the first section and demonstrates the recognition of failure and the finality of death. The sincerity with which the speaker believed in happiness amounted to nothing: he now seems to tell himself that this is the way of life, that this must be faced. Here again is the temporality of existence which harks back to the title and the general theme.

Structurally section II and III belong together, insofar as III deals with "Hintergründe der Glücke,"⁶ only briefly indicated in the love-idyll

⁵ The invocation of the past, the wish to go back in years to an era of peace, where no estrangement between the individual and the world as yet existed, is a surprisingly common feature in modern poetry despite its frequent occurrence in Romanticism. Quite apart from German poetry we also find it in Rimbaud's *Une Saison en Enfer* (Paris, 1949), 208: "Ah! l'enfance, l'herbe, la pluie, le lac sur les pierres . . ."; and in D. H. Lawrence's poem "Piano," *Poems* (N. Y., 1947), 55: ". . . The glamour / Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast / Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past . . ." Among contemporary poets we have a good example in R. Eberhart's poem "If I could only live at the pitch . . ." *Mid-Century American Poets*, ed. J. Ciardi (N. Y., 1950), 235: ". . . Then I cast time out of the trees and fields, / Then I stood immaculate in the Ego; / Then I eyed the world with all delight, / Reality was the perfection of my sight."

⁶ The fact that the poet uses the plural of "Glück" is a further indication of the many separate attempts and failures at happiness.

of II. The background, the What?, now becomes all-absorbing. It is a more intense evocation or invocation of a past where all the potentialities were lost. From the awareness of death in the previous section there is the inevitable reaction — not to want to be aware of the end.

In the first stanza of III a number of the more or less fundamental terms the poet has used before are significantly repeated. "Unverantwortlich und nicht das Ende wissen," for instance, hints at a yearning for withdrawal and delay of the awareness of death. This is a regressive trend, a desire to be like young lovers again, to feel only the immediate personal (physical) needs. And with *Durst*, as the elemental drive, the primal desire, the poet takes up again the thirst motif of section I. The youth's single wish is here elevated into a vague mysticism:

hinüberlangen in jenes Andere, — in was?

The first part of the line is a kind of metaphysical statement (implying loss of identity) which is immediately brought up short with the question: into what? The poet questions the nature of this vagueness. Then he gives the various answers to death: the various ways which the human mind constructs in order not to see it. This seems to be the crux here. But none of the human solutions works, simply because there is no solution to the fact of death.

In the next stanza we move from abstraction to something more specific. The evening image⁷ conveys the feeling of an impossible escape, despite brief and fading reminiscences:

... aber am Grund sind Blumen,
es duftet herauf, kurz und zitternd,
dahinter natürlich die Verwesung . . .

This again is a desperate attempt to use love as a narcotic, which is parallel to the flower image that has already been the image of love, but this time it is in a more decadent state ("duftet . . . Verwesung"), just as love has turned into prostitution ("wirfst dein Geld hin und gehst"). There is nothing left. Love has become a business transaction, and the desire to have the actual true experience without any falsity ("nimm das Rouge von deinem Munde . . .") is not fulfilled here. The third stanza, then, expresses complete disillusionment. It demonstrates the failure of love as a proposition.

This section leads into the fourth, which, framed by the ironic refrain "Little old Lady," is the continuation and culmination of the love image. The general theme, that of life futile and of love worthless, is here focused. The fourth section deals with actualities: the death of Hearst, the legendary figure of America's greatest publishing empire, and the

⁷ There is a similarity in tone and atmosphere between this evening image and Rimbaud's at the beginning of his *Une Saison en Enfer*, 195. How much Benn owes to Rimbaud is hard to tell. The influence of Rimbaud on expressionism is generally known and was stressed again by Mr. Blume at the MLA meeting in Boston, 1952, by following the motif of the *Wasserleiche* in modern German literature.

love of Marion Davies, for whom Hearst had built a tremendous home ("Schloß à la Pompadour") on the sands at Santa Monica. The section is an imaginative reconstruction and dramatization of her reaction to his death. In the tile-floored bedroom in her California home she recalls her past. Her life has been filled with superficialities and dedicated to the devastating elements of journalism, radio, and material glamor which have destroyed tradition and have been hostile to all distinctions. It has been, in the poet's view, a world of loveless loving, a world of an "undemanding surface neatness," which now is depicted all the more neatly by the introduction of the Hollywood columnist, Louella. It is the modern world of indifference and boredom stimulated by drinks and jitterbugging — manifestations of escape. It is the world of Gatsby in California with Santa Monica as the symbol of an obscene futile world. Her lover's death, for all the wealth surrounding it, brings forcefully home to her the inevitable end. What remains for her is but his superficial humor and her own humiliation. Death has put an end to everything, even to love. Here, too, life has slipped by without amounting to anything, and Marion Davies, feeling sorry for her present, smashes the glass on the tiled floor. Its breaking echoes the final tone of a rhapsody that brings back the refrain, unmistakably now, that she is simply a helpless old "Lady" in an overblown bedchamber.

In passing, Benn utilizes the opportunity the section provides to assail bourgeois society and its luxurious material superficiality. Just as Fitzgerald was a part of the world he described, so is Benn, with all his sensibility, part of our modern society. He is, in a sense, weary of it but not removed from it, afraid, disgusted and yet at the same time so much concerned that he underscores in as ironically poignant a situation as possible the emptiness of love in its most extravagant pose in the face of death.

And here too Benn's syntax, the sentences fractured by dashes and exclamations, emphasizes the frantic confusion of emotion and the general breakdown of values. The break in rhythm is obvious. The lines move, after the adaptation of the popular tune, into prose rhythm which is maintained through all five stanzas and lends a reportorial feeling to the atmosphere: fragments of conversation intermingled with bits of *monologue intérieur* ("er wird nun stumm sein zu jener Stunde"), exclamations ("Radio! . . . die Blues, Jitterbug — Zickzack —!, hochprozentig!"), newspaper jottings ("in Frühstücksstuben entscheidet sich das Leben, am Strand im Bathdress hagelt es Granit . . .").

Between section IV and V occurs the sharpest break. The view, first personal and then specified, now becomes larger. Section V is a philosophical summing up of I-IV. The specified and the common experience are here projected into the universe without dissolving the abstract. The eternal is seen in the moment. Life is now weighted and measured by the hour, and the hour belongs to you as little as eternity.

Affected by the impact of his recognition that there is no meaning in the unity and variety of existence, the poet now talks not only to himself, but addresses also the reader. In a rather didactic way he submits his final insights into life, which he wants man to understand.

Fühle, doch wisse, Jahrtausende fühlten —
 Meer und Getier und die kopflosen Sterne
 ringen es nieder heute wie einst —

It does not matter how intensively the individual attempts to penetrate to the essence of life, whether emotionally or, as in the next stanza, intellectually, the attempt comes to nothing. What remains is the indifferent phenomena of the universe of which man is but an insignificant element. Even the illustrious minds (or the artists) drift in their own wash. Essentially, they merely play a game like all other men. Their existence, too, lasts only for a brief moment like that of a flower.

If man knows all this, if he has experienced this, then he should bear the hour, for this is all he can do, and this is all he can know. There is no eternal possession:

Menschen und Engel und Cherubime,
 Schwarzgeflügel, Hellgeäugtes,
 keines war deines —
 deines nie.

Man was never able to reach either other men, or his ideals, his sins or his virtues: nothing was ever his. Transitoriness remains, is paradoxically the one constant element.

The striking thing about these stanzas is their compelling movement and tone from now to the end of the poem. The greatest difference between these two sections and all the preceding is the rhythmical and metrical regularity and the rhyme, which occur occasionally in section V and as a regular rhyme scheme in section VI. Possibly, this increasingly rounded structure is to underline the finality of these last insights presented here. The verbs come immediately into the foreground and bear the stress (*fühle, denke, wisse*). The imperatives strike the reader, and with the feeling and experience conveyed they lend a prophetic note to these lines.

One must bear all the various shades of thematic meaning in mind when considering the last section, to me the most beautiful of the whole poem. Throughout the poem we have returned by devious and various ways, by a constant shift of imagery, to the central theme at different levels. We have observed the particular beauty and boldness of diction, the poet's use of modern speech idiom, the mastery of transition from one stanza to the other, the fall into prose rhythm and the occasional irony. The poem as such has been a continuously deepening exploration from a clear autumnal day at the beginning to the somewhat ghostly beauty that rises in the image of these last stanzas. The end is darker than the beginning. It is very late now. Too late. Night is falling and despair

constrains the human figures as they cross the bridge with the end clearly in view. The familiar poetic symbol of the bridge,⁸ suggesting the span from life to death (which once more draws us back to the whole poem and its central theme whose final meaning is condensed here), is used for a surrealistic vision, flowing out into a somewhat apocalyptic and not at all reassuring final note that is vibrant with sadness and tenderness and so conveys an attitude that stoically accepts the inexorable fact of death. The human figures, overshadowed by the darkness of death, attempt the various human devices of avoiding the apparent darkness. This wanting not to see and yet being compelled to see death is also described with time and space symbols in Garia Lorca's "La Sangre Derramada" in regard to the bullfighter, poet, and painter Ignacio who, in contrast to the ghostly figures on the bridge, seeks to find a positive spiritual form.⁹ Some of the figures turn their backs to death, still unwilling to face it; others drop their canes (the now worthless illusions with which they have moved through life), and they stop their watches. At the moment of death they are bereft of their paraphernalia. They are the subjects of death and as such without identity. It now no longer matters whether they realize time or not ("die Ziffern brauchen kein Licht"); it goes by anyway. Their mood, willingly or not, is fixed upon a reality outside of human experience to which, as well as to its end, the only possible reaction is weeping.

The intensity of the image is drawn from the strength of each particular line. The regularity of the first of these two stanzas underlines the inevitability with which all these figures move toward the bridges. The alternation between dactylic and trochaic beats of the lines provides retardation and flow, and emphasizes the hesitation obvious in the figures' movement. This hesitation is effectively stressed by the one break in the rhythmical regularity of the entire section: the run-over line "halten die Uhren/an." The uncertainty and tension achieved by these devices not only point out the agonized state of the figures, but also point to the final pleading question with which the poem concludes. The efficacy of this ghostly scene is furthermore supported by the rich rhyme effects, by assonants (the vowel sounds *i, u, ü, a*), by alliteration (the *sh*-pattern in "nicht," "schmale," "schwarze," "Gestalten," "Stecken," etc., and in "wie," "wenden," "wandern," "weinen"), by the effect of the anaphora ("alle wandern — alle weinen"), by the softening euphonic effect of "alle weinen," and by the framing of the entire section through the repetition of the same question ("siehst du es nicht?"). All these devices heighten

⁸ For instance, T. S. Eliot (derived from Dante): "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many. / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, / and each man fixed his eyes before his feet . . ." *Collected Poems, 1909-1935* (London, 1948) 63.

⁹ "Por las gradas sube Ignacio / con toda su muerte a cuestras. / Buscaba el amanecer, / y el amanecer no era. / Busca su perfil seguro / y el sueño lo desorienta . . ." *Poema del Cante Jondo*, "Llanto por la muerte de Ignacio Sanchez Mejías," (Buenos Aires, 1944) 117.

the effect of the image. Every word has become emphasis, direction, pointing at the central idea. The close structure of the lines corresponds to the density of the confronting image, its terror and unavailability – death.

The theme which the poet has developed from the opening stanza is rounded out in the final death image. There is no solution; no hopeful answer is offered in the form of any concept that might transcend the nihilistic and stoic conviction that man in a late and advanced age can do nothing except to bear the fact of death. Benn, like Eliot in *The Waste Land* and Pound in "Mauberly," tries to look dispassionately at a time that no longer has an accepted system of belief. It is the look of one for whom the breakdown of theology and its substitute, love, has become a fact. "It is not the poet's business," as Helen Gardner says of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, "to make us believe *what* he believes . . . but he must convince us that he himself is convinced."¹⁰ Is Benn convinced? Does the heroic pose, this Nietzschean pose, the attitude of the negative hero, really represent his final answer, particularly when we consider the last line of this beautiful poem? As Benn himself said in *Doppelleben*: "the soul still looks for the absolute." We may leave the poem with this question. A question is often the wisest way to conclude a subject.

¹⁰ *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1949), p. 68.



SPÄT

GOTTFRIED BENN

I

Die alten schweren Bäume
in großen Parks
und die Blumengärten,
die feucht verwirren –

Herbstliche Süße.
Polster von Erika
die Autobahn entlang,
alles ist Lüneburger
Heide, lila und unfruchtbar,
Versonnenheiten, die zu Nichts führen,
in sich gekehrtes Kraut,
das bald hinabbräunt
– Frage eines Monats –
ins Nieerblühte.

Dies die Natur.
Und durch die City
in freundlichem Licht
fahren die Bierwagen
Ausklangssänfte, auch Unbesorgnis
vor Reizzuständen, Durst und Ungestilltem –
was stillt sich nicht? Nur kleine Kreise!
Die großen schwelgen
in Übermaßen.

II

So enden die Blicke, die Blicke zurück:
Felder und Seen eingewachsen in deine Tage
und die ersten Lieder
aus einem alten Klavier.

Begegnungen der Seele! Jugend!
Dann selbst gestaltet
Treubruch, Verfehlen, Verfall –
die Hintergründe der Glücke.

Und Liebe!
"Ich glaube dir, daß du gern bei mir geblieben wärest,
aber es nicht konntest,
ich spreche dich frei von jeder Schuld" –
ja, Liebe,
schwer und vielgestalt
jahrelang verborgen
werden wir einander zurufen: "nicht vergessen,"
bis einer tot ist –
so enden die Rosen,
Blatt um Blatt.

III

Noch einmal so sein wie früher:
unverantwortlich und nicht das Ende wissen,
das Fleisch fühlen: Durst, Zärtlichkeit, Erobern, Verlieren,
hinüberlangen in jenes Andere, – in was?

Abends dasitzen, in den Schlund der Nacht sehen,
er verengert sich, aber am Grund sind Blumen,
es duftet herauf, kurz und zitternd,
dahinter natürlich die Verwesung,
dann ist es ganz dunkel und du weißt wieder dein Teil,
wirfst dein Geld hin und gehst –

soviel Lügen geliebt,
soviel Worten geglaubt,
die nur aus der Wölbung der Lippen kamen,
und dein eignes Herz
so wandelbar, bodenlos und augenblicklich –

soviel Lügen geliebt,
soviel Lippen gesucht
("nimm das Rouge von deinem Munde,
gib ihn mir blaß")

und der Fragen immer mehr –.

IV

*Little old Lady
in a big red room*

little old lady –

summt Marion Davies,
während Hearst, ihr Freund seit 30 Jahren,
in schwerem Kupfersarg unter dem Schutz einer starken Eskorte
und gefolgt von 22 schwarzen Limusinen
vor dem Marmormausoleum eintrifft,
leise surren die Fernkameras.

Little old Lady, großer roter Raum,
hennarot, sanft gladiolenrot, kaiserrot (Purpurschnecke),
Schlafzimmer in Santa Monica Schloß
à la Pompadour –

Louella, ruft sie, Radio!
die Blues, Jitterbug – Zickzack –!
Das Bürgertum im atlantischen Raum:
heiratsfähige Töchter und obliterierter Sexus,
Palazzos an den Bays, Daunendecken auf den Pfühlen,
die Welt teilen sie ein in Monde und Demimonde –
ich war immer Letzteres –

Louella, meine Mischung – hochprozentig!
Was soll das alles –
gedemütigt, hochgekämpft, hündisch gelitten –
die Züge, häßliche Züge, mit denen jetzt der Kupfersarg Schluß macht,
überrann ein Licht, wenn er mich sah,
auch Reiche lieben, zittern, kennen die Verdammnis. –
Hochprozentig – das Glas an den Silberapparat,
er wird nun stumm sein zu jener Stunde,
die nur wir beide wußten, –
drollige Sprüche kamen aus der Muschel,
"in Frühstücksstuben entscheidet sich das Leben,
am Strand im Bathdress hagelt es Granit,
das Unerwartete pflegt einzutreten,
das Erhoffte geschieht nie –"
das waren seine Stories.

Schluß mit der Promenade!
Nur noch einige Steinfliesen,
auf die vorderste das Glas
hochprozentig, Klirren, letzte Rhapsodie –.
*Little old Lady
in a big red room. –*

V

Fühle, doch wisse, Jahrtausende fühlten –
Meer und Getier und die kopflosen Sterne
ringen es nieder heute wie einst –

Denke, doch wisse, die Allererlauchtesten
treiben in ihrem eigenen Kiel,
sind nur das Gelb der Butterblume,
auch andere Farben spielen ihr Spiel –

wisse das alles und trage die Stunde,
keine wie diese, jede wie sie,
Menschen und Engel und Cherubime,
Schwarzgeflühtes, Hellgeäugtes,
keines war deines —
deines nie.

VI

Siehst du es nicht, wie einige halten,
viele wenden den Rücken zu,
seltsame hohe schmale Gestalten,
alle wandern den Brücken zu.

Senken die Stecken, halten die Uhren
an, die Ziffern brauchen kein Licht,
schwindende Scharen, schwarze Figuren,
alle weinen — siehst du es nicht?



WATER AS SYMBOL AND MOTIF IN THE POETRY OF CLEMENS BRENTANO

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Clemens Brentano (1778-1842) has usually been considered by the literary historian in four principal references: as the author of that turgid and characteristically Romantic novel, *Godwi*; as one major contributor to legends of the Rhine with his *Rheimmärchen*; as the author of that complex and most imaginative fantasy, *Die Romanzen vom Rosenkranz*; and finally as Achim von Arnim's collaborator on *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Only superficially, however, have his original poems gained mention, and detailed analysis hardly at all: those poems in which, and through which, this poet's highly involved nature emerges in a not less prominent way. In the main, scholarly attention has been directed heretofore to those features of Brentano's poetry which are generally typical of the Romantic period itself, rather than to those which are particular and individually characteristic, and in which something of the poet's personality may be described. Moreover, Clemens Brentano has been woefully neglected with regard to editions of his not inconsiderable output; there exists no complete edition of his poems alone, to say nothing of the complete works, and the selection of letters recently edited by Friedrich Seebass — the first to appear in its scope — is only a selection, albeit a good one.¹

In treating "Auf dem Rhein" as an example of "reißende Zeit" in his unique study on *Die Zeit als Einbildungskraft des Dichters*,² Emil Staiger significantly selected a work which exhibits not only an aspect of time characteristic of Brentano the poet, but also a motif which recurs throughout a large part of his verse as well as his prose and even correspondence: that of water in its various appearances, as the ocean, river, lake, and its corollary images as drinking, the cup, and the oasis in the desert. Indeed, so prominent is this image and its opposite, that of the lack of water, of thirst and of the desert, that it might not be entirely futile to inquire what significance these dual metaphors may possess, and why they seem to appeal to this poet to such a remarkable degree.

One of the primary qualities of water may be termed instability, as contrasted with the firm security of the land. Both the failing swimmer and the storm-tossed ship are at the mercy of this shifting, liquid element. That sense of solidity, of a basic foundation which the earth so comfortably affords is lost, or at least is diminished, when one ventures upon the ocean or even the small lake, not to ignore the treacherous currents of the Bingerloch in "Der Schiffer im Kahne." This quality of water as a

¹ *Clemens Brentano. Briefe* (Nürnberg, 1951), 2 vols.

² *Die Zeit als Einbildungskraft des Dichters. Untersuchungen zu Gedichten von Brentano, Goethe und Keller* (Zürich und Leipzig, 1939), 21-98.

poetic image may reflect Brentano's own highly unstable and vacillating nature, so apparent in his external biography alone. Never finding that happy emotional relationship which he most desired and needed, never quite attaining to that intimate *rapprochement* with another human being toward which he always strove, his life and work present a picture, or rather, a kaleidoscope, of a soul torn by conflict, never to reach true harmony with itself, with man, or even with God. Clemens Brentano was never able to bridge the gap between his individuality and life, despite two marriages; close friends like Arnim, who married Bettina, and Savigny, who wed Kunigunde Brentano; his will-o'-the-wisp amatory escapades; and relative financial security. That the unstable and transitory quality of water would naturally appeal to such a man, who is also a poet, should occasion no surprise. The fast-flowing river, the rain, the dew: these are evanescent; these, so to speak, do not remain within the framework of time, but pass on in their immediate forms and vanish forever.

Another quality of water, related to that of its instability, is danger, the threat of drowning. The symbol of water in this negative aspect occurs in expressing the menace of that perilous existence which confronts Brentano, a menace which he discovers primarily in the experience of love. For him, love seems to possess two contrary aspects, one destructive and the other redemptive, the one embodied in an Auguste Busmann, and the other in an Emilie Linder. In this dichotomy, Brentano's concept of woman may be reflected. He sees her indeed as the temptress who seduces him with her physical charms (here one may best refer to the prose fragment *Der schiffbrüchige Galeerensklave vom todten Meer*),³ yet he hopes that she might somehow draw him upwards into a higher and ethical sphere, in which all conflicts of flesh and spirit are resolved. The pernicious aspect of woman, beguiling and luring, appears principally in the figure of the siren (e. g. "Der Schiffer und die Sirene"). And in "Den ersten Tropfen dieser Leidensfluth," Brentano despairingly reflects: "Ich kenn das all, schiffbrüchig auf dem Meer / Schwimmt drohend es in Trümmern um mich her, / Weh! — der Sirene nackte Schulter blank, / An der gescheitert ich den Sinn verloren, / Zuckt dort empor . . ." For Brentano's sensitive conscience, to yield to the siren is at the same time to surrender that part of woman which is redemptive; it is a submission to lower physical desires of which the powerful "Frühlingsschrei eines Knechtes aus der Tiefe," with its bitter subterranean waters, is perhaps the prime example. The goal which Brentano seeks, a spiritualized love for woman, is hence rendered unattainable through the danger of succumbing to an excess of sensuality.

Lack of water, the antithesis of our principal motif, and yet clearly related to it, appears in the images of thirst and of the desert. Through

³ W. Rehm, *Clemens Brentanos Romanfragment Der schiffbrüchige Galeerensklave vom todten Meer*, *Abhandlungen der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1949), Jg. 1948, Nr. 4.

them, human love and divine love appear as the two poles around which Brentano's inner existence revolves. His pressing need for affection, as for the gratification of the erotic impulse, finds expression in the image of thirst, symbolizing the lack of a love-object, while the metaphors of the well, the spring, and the *Becher*, indicate the gratification of this need. "Aus deines Herzens Raume / Möcht' ich nur einmal trinken, / Und dann zum kühnsten Traume / Im Götterrausche sinken," he chants to Sophie Mereau, his first wife.⁴ The approach of Meliore to the dwelling of Biondetta, in the *Romanzen vom Rosenkranz*, is described thus: "Will er eilen zu dem Brunnen, / Wo der Trank lebendig waltet."⁵ Elsewhere, Brentano addresses a woman of loose morals in this way: "Du schönes Weib, du elend Weib, / Wer wird den Becher trinken?"⁶

But the same image of thirst may also connote the poet's yearning for the cleansing waters of Grace Divine. Here, the most prominent image is that of the desert, representing a state of grievous sin and consequent isolation from God. Brentano, despite years of non-practice of his childhood faith, could never completely abnegate this matrix in which he had been nurtured. "Katholizismus ist keine Sache des Meinens, sondern der Artung," says Friedrich Gundolf, referring in this general statement particularly to Clemens Brentano.⁷ Reinhold Schneider has indicated this symbolic aspect of the desert in his discussion of the poem "An den Engel in der Wüste."⁸ But the not less significant "Der Traum der Wüste" and "Durch die weite öde Wüste" should also not be overlooked. The desert thus appears as the counterpart to that ocean, river, or whirlpool in which the guilty soul may perish, as does Lore Lay beneath the waters of the Rhine in the poem bearing her name. And, as in the case of the siren, the desert may also contain a fascination for the poet: he may see mirages of oases and blooming gardens, but these signify only a brief refreshment and, in the end, death. "O Wüstentraum der Lieb'! in der Oase / Labt dich am Quell, der zwischen Palmen glänzt, / Ein schlankes Kind — die Schlange ist's im Grase, / Der Räuber Kundschaft'rin, ein Truggespenst."⁹

But water, in its refreshing and life-giving mode, may also connote a positive quality: the reception and emanation of Divine Grace. This may be considered as the opposite pole to that reflection of the sensual element already noted, and as signifying the release from torment in the desert of an individualism carried beyond its proper bounds. A stone in

⁴ *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. C. Brentano (Frankfurt am Main, 1852-55), II, 114. Hereafter referred to as GS.

⁵ *Clemens Brentanos Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. Schüddekopf, H. Amelung a. o., (München und Leipzig, 1909-17), IV, 26.

⁶ Lujó Brentano, *Clemens Brentanos Liebesleben: eine Ansicht* (Frankfurt am Main, 1921), 188.

⁷ "Über Clemens Brentano," *Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde* (Leipzig, 1928), Heft 2, 101.

⁸ *Dämonie und Verklärung* (Vaduz, 1947), 165-200.

⁹ GS II, 196.

the desert miraculously gives forth water to the wretched poet when he pleads for surcease from the burning heat,¹⁰ and of the Virgin Mary, he speaks thus: "In ihrem milden Augenstrahl / Da fließen süße Bronnen, / Da will von aller Erdenqual / Ich laben mich und sonnen."¹¹ *Sonnen* – no longer the burning rays of the sun in the desert of spiritual isolation, but soothing beams which pour out, this time, a supernatural revivification, an image, incidentally, in which the confluence of the two principal images may be recognized. In this general reference, one finds a multitude of metaphors deriving from the roots *gießen* and *fließen* which are strongly reminiscent of the vocabulary of earlier German mysticism, e. g. *passim*: *Himmelsflüsse, Gnadenbrommen, Heilerguß, Und die Erde wird ertrinken / in des ew'gen Lichtes Meer . . .* and so forth. Brentano, so well-read in medieval and Baroque literature, apparently discovered in contemplative mysticism that to which he himself was unable to attain: the *unio mystica*, the complete submergence, as if beneath waves of the ocean, of the soul in God. Like a medieval man, he constantly hovered on earth between hell and heaven, and many expressions in his vocabulary after 1817, the year of his conversion, reveal a strong parallel to the imagery of earlier mysticism, if not an actual debt.

¹⁰GS I, 486; cf. also Exodus XVII, 6.

¹¹GS I, 481.



IN MEMORIAM

MARSHALL BLAKEMORE EVANS

1874-1953

The close of the last academic year in June was saddened by the death of M. B. Evans, Professor Emeritus of German at Ohio State University, long a leader in the now thinning ranks of the Old Guard in German.

The annals of Evans' life mark him as a representative of a generation of Americans who fell heir by direct descent to an era of the "Flowering of New England" with its pervading interest in the world of German letters and philosophy.

Born of old New England stock in Roslindale, a suburb of Boston, Evans was enrolled in its public school system. At the age of eleven he entered the Boston Latin School, and after its seven-year curriculum, Boston University, where he specialized in the classic languages and literatures. Fellow students here were William Ellery Leonard and Ludwig Lewisohn.

Upon receiving his bachelor's degree in 1896 Evans spent a year in the mercantile business of his father before answering the call of his true inclination: the study of English and German philology. With this end in view he followed in the path of a large number of student predecessors from his native New England and turned to the seminars of the German universities of Göttingen and Bonn for advanced study. At these institutions he received his training under Heyne, Litzmann, Morsbach, Roethe, and Wilmanns.

Returned to America in 1902 with the doctorate conferred under Wilmann's direction by the University of Bonn, Evans was called in 1903 to the German department of the University of Wisconsin under the chairmanship of Hohlfeld.

In 1911 he was called to the chairmanship of the German Department at Ohio State University, which he served until his retirement in 1945. Equipped as he was by training, temperament, and experience, he came at an opportune time to participate in laying the groundwork for the building up of the young graduate school at that institution.

His chairmanship was distinguished by self-effacing and unobtrusive guidance in welding together through serene and troubled times an effectively homogenous working group by his own pattern of adaptability.

His professorship, without all ostentation, has been a humble profession of his subject and centered in the joy of enlightenment he was bringing to the consciousness of his own and succeeding generations.

Evans' years since his retirement were such as every emeritus professor might wish for himself in the autumn of life. The year 1945-46

he served as visiting professor at Harvard University. In the subsequent years until the very last, Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, availed itself of his services as lecturer in advanced literary courses. These years saw the appearance in print — the first complete and definitive text — of his *The Lucerne Passion Play* as a volume in the collected works of Renward Cysat under the sponsorship of the Canton of Lucerne, Switzerland. To the very last Evans was occupied with a forthcoming revised edition of the successful *College German*. Engaged in this occupation, he laid aside his pen for the last time.

Evans' departure is a distinct loss to the study and teaching of German; we have need for such enlightened devotion to the cause of humane letters in this day and age. It is a loss to the *Monatshefte*; Evans was a frequent and able contributor since 1907. It is no less a loss to his friends, colleagues, and former students; for all their awareness of the humanly inevitable, they would wish to have seen his term extended.

— G.

ROBERT LOHAN

Dr. Robert Lohan, author of several well-known German textbooks, died on June 15, 1953, at his home in Oneonta, New York, after a long illness. He was sixty-nine and professor emeritus of Hartwick College, where he taught German and established the department of speech and dramatics. Author of *Modern German*, *Living German Literature*, and *The Golden Age of German Literature*, as well as books on speech and pedagogy, Dr. Lohan was for six years up to the time of his death one of the editors of an encyclopedic German-English dictionary, the first to be based primarily on American English, in preparation by Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. Dr. Lohan was born in Austria and received his doctorate from the University of Vienna. During his long and active career he was professor of German, Latin, and French, college president, lecturer, publisher, and stage director. He was especially active as a teacher of public speaking and dramatics, numbering many prominent actors among his pupils. A Lutheran by birth and an opponent of the Hitler regime, he was dismissed from his teaching position when the Nazis took over Austria in 1938. After a year as assistant professor of German literature and language at the University of Reading, England, he came to the United States, taught at Bethany College, Kansas, then joined the faculty of Hartwick College in 1942. At the time of his death Dr. Lohan was engaged in writing his tenth book, one on German cultural history. He is survived by his wife, Maria Yeglitsch Lohan.

NEWS AND NOTES

PROFESSOR FRIEDRICH VON DER LEYEN (München 23, Moltkestrasse 7/o) hat am 19. VIII. dieses Jahres sein 80. Lebensjahr vollendet. Wie wir hören, trägt er sich mit der Absicht, zu Ende des Sommersemesters seine Vorlesungstätigkeit an der Universität München einzustellen. Aus diesen Anlässen wird auch die amerikanische Germanistik des erfolgreichen akademischen Lehrers und verdienten Forschers herzlich gedenken, der als Gastdozent in Yale, Harvard und Stanford gewirkt hat und sich stets um die Vertiefung der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen bemühte und noch bemüht. Als Nachkomme von Friedrich Kapp ist er für diese Rolle besonders geeignet; eine Anzahl seiner Schüler, Deutsche und gebürtige Amerikaner, lehren in diesem Lande. Aufgeschlossen, weltoffen und vielseitig ist überhaupt seine Persönlichkeit, die sich auch von Anfang an nicht an die engen Grenzen des Spezialfachs binden ließ. So galt seit der Münchner Habilitationsschrift über *Das Märchen in den Göttersagen der Edda* (1899) sein wissenschaftliches Interesse besonders den volkstümlichen Formen der Literatur: dem Märchen, der Sage und dem Mythos, sowie der deutschen Volkskunde im allgemeinen — einem Gebiet, das sich an den deutschen Hochschulen damals nicht der besten Unterstützung erfreute. Die Frucht seiner Forschungen über die Entstehung des Märchens, *Das Märchen* (in „Wissenschaft und Bildung“, zuerst 1909), ist bei kleinem Format ein grundlegendes Buch geblieben und soll erst in diesem Jahre durch ein größeres Werk ersetzt werden. In der imposanten, von ihm geschaffenen Reihe *Märchen der Weltliteratur* nimmt seine Ausgabe der Grimmschen Märchen wegen ihrer bedeutsamen Einleitung und kritischen Anordnung einen ausgezeichneten Platz ein. *Die Götter und Göttersagen der Germanen* (1908 und 1920) sind 1938 als *Die Götter der Germanen* neu aufgelegt worden. Diesem 1. Bande des *Deutschen Sagenbuches* folgten *Die deutschen Heldensagen*; für die Sagen des Mittelalters und die Volksagen wurden Mitarbeiter gewonnen. Eine Reihe *Deutsche Stämme — Deutsche Lande* unternahm eine volkskundliche Schilderung der einzelnen deutschen Landschaften. Andere Arbeiten hatten pädagogische Ziele, wie z. B. *Deutsche Universität und deutsche Zukunft* (1906). Seine Gattin, eine erfolgreiche Porträtmalerin, machte die bildenden Künste zu einer Quelle tiefen Erlebens (so veröffentlichte er mit A. Spamer: *Die altdeutschen Teppiche im Rathaus zu Regensburg*, 1912). — Diese unorthodoxe Tätigkeit wurde erst 1920 durch die Berufung auf den germanistischen Lehrstuhl in Köln belohnt. An der neugegründeten Universität konnten sich nun die angeborene Liebe zum Lehren und das große organisatorische Talent entfalten. Die Bibliothek des Deutschen Seminars, eigentlich aus dem Nichts geschaffen, wurde nach einigen Jahren nur noch von der (jetzt zerstörten) Leipziger Seminarbibliothek an Bücherzahl übertroffen und auch von dieser kaum an Reichhaltigkeit. Stiftungen, darunter eine bedeutende aus USA, ermöglichten nicht nur den Ausbau des Seminars in den widrigsten Nachkriegszeiten, sondern auch Studienreisen mit Studenten in Deutschland, nach Österreich und nach dem Norden (Schweden, Dänemark, Norwegen). Die

nordischen und niederländischen Studien wurden ebenso gefördert wie das Institut für Theaterwissenschaft. Es erschienen *Deutsche Arbeiten der Universität Köln* bei Diederichs. An eigenen Werken entstanden *Deutsche Dichtung in neuer Zeit*; *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung, ein Überblick*; *Dichtung und Volkstum*. Die Bücher des Mittelalters begannen zu erscheinen; auch das großangelegte Lesebuch *Das Buch deutscher Dichtung* geht auf die Kölner Zeit zurück. Trotz aller Verdienste um die deutschen Forschungen gestaltete sich aber von der Leyens Stellung in den ersten Jahren des Dritten Reiches immer ungünstiger und im Frühjahr 1937 wurde er schließlich emeritiert. Die Folgezeit verbrachte er als geschäftsführender Präsident der Deutschen Akademie in München, kehrte dann aber nach dem Zusammenbruch wieder nach Köln zurück und half bei der Wiederaufrichtung der Universität. In den letzten Jahren las er in München. Seine *Deutsche Philologie, eine Einführung in ihr Studium* (Stuttgart, 1952), das brauchbarste Handbuch unseres Fachs, ist die vorläufig letzte Gabe aus seiner Feder. Möge sein *otium cum dignitate* ihm vergönnen, noch weitere Pläne zu verwirklichen, zum Besten der Wissenschaft und zur Freude seiner alten Schüler!

University of Illinois.

—Ernst Alfred Philippson

CONFERENCE ON THE TEACHING OF MODERN LANGUAGES. Sponsored by the University of Missouri with the support of the Carnegie Foundation, a meeting of modern language teachers was held in Columbia, Mo., on April 24 and 25, 1953. Dean Cecil G. Taylor (Louisiana State University) and Professor Walter V. Kaulfers (University of Illinois) gave the main addresses and attended the panel and round table discussions as consultants. Participants in the panel discussions were Professors W. L. Crain, Helen Cleaver, Edward J. Schuster, Esteban Vargas-Vales, Cecil McVicker, John S. Brushwood, Anna Blair, Arthur J. Cullen, Mrs. Hortense P. Davison, and Mrs. L. M. Hepple. Professors Liselotte Dieckmann, Homer Welsh, Elizabeth Callo-way, Cynthia Press, and Hermann Barnstorff took charge of the various round table discussions.

TEXTBOOKS RECEIVED

GERMAN IN REVIEW, Revised Edition, by Robert O. Röseler. Henry Holt and Company, 1953. \$2.50. The principal changes in the revision of this conveniently arranged and time-tested review grammar are: the addition of two sections on pronominal compounds, which received scanty attention in the first edition; the inclusion of a lesson on conjunctions instead of merely listing them in the Synopsis of Grammar; the insertion of fourteen "review" lessons illustrating grammatical principles by brief selections from such authors as Hesse, Löns, Raabe, Mann, Schweizer, Keller, and Meyer; considerably greater emphasis on "recognition grammar" than in the original edition. Relatively few changes

have been made in the English to German translation exercises. While few instructors will care to use all of the exercises provided, the abundance and variety of the material make it easy to select portions appropriate to any given class situation. The arrangement of the book into one or two-page sections, each emphasizing a single topic of grammar, makes it suitable for use in reading courses where a grammar review is desired; it may also be used as the basic text in a grammar and composition course.

ESSENTIALS OF READING GERMAN, by Louis DeVries and Alfred P. Kehlenbeck. Rinehart and Company, 1953. \$3.60. Part I of this novel text, apparently intended for Ph. D. candidates seeking a reading knowledge of German, deals with the entire *corpus* of German grammar in four lengthy lessons (pages 3-84). The first part also contains sections on word formation, punctuation and orthography, and pronunciation. Part II (Usage) singles out individual difficulties encountered in reading and provides explanations and practice materials. Part III includes 76 pages of reading material from various scientific fields with basic vocabularies for each field. Some of this reading consists of disconnected sentences, some of connected material. Since the text is intended for mature students who will work with a dictionary, no end vocabulary is provided. Part I, originally copyrighted by Professor Kehlenbeck in 1940, carries to an extreme the basically sound principle of presenting the grammar in large, coherent units. For example, the first chapter, entitled "The Substantive," deals exhaustively with the declension of articles, nouns, pronouns, limiting and descriptive adjectives; it further includes the comparison of adjectives, numerals, and a discussion of the participial construction. Although the grammatical explanations are purportedly presented "in terms of their purely functional value for reading," some of them seem unduly complicated and technical: Is the relative position of direct and indirect objects essential for a reading knowledge (page 84)? While the chapter on word formation is excellent, the chapter on pronunciation shows signs of hasty preparation: *ch* does not have the sound *ts* in either 'Chaucer' or 'Chamberlain' (page 100); 'lessen' on page 101 is a misprint; the symbol *sz* is used only on page 101; elsewhere in the book *ß* is consistently used; the symbols at the bottom of page 102 are *digraphs*; not *diagraphs*. Part II represents a reworking of Professor DeVries' useful *Guide to Scientific German* (Rinehart, 1947). The reading materials and vocabularies in Part III are new. In spite of a certain amount of duplication (for example, in the treatment of the participial construction in Parts I and II), the book contains much useful information. A good index is provided.

GESPROCHENES DEUTSCH, by Erich Funke. Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953. \$2.50. This book is intended for conversational classes on the intermediate level. It consists in the main of fifteen conversations, each one four or five pages long, followed in all but one case by a brief reading selection which summarizes and supplements the subject matter of the conversation. In line with present trends, the topics treated are largely of a cultural nature, ranging from the geography and history

of the German-speaking countries of Europe to the Amana colony in Iowa. The tone of the conversations is lively and up-to-date; indeed, the author does not hesitate to introduce slang and even an occasional dialect form. The subjects treated are equally lively and up-to-date, touching upon such matters as American politics, juvenile delinquency, and the United States of Europe. The exercise material includes questions on the conversations and texts as well as topics for *freie Übungen*. A brief introduction is devoted to pronunciation. A separate section is devoted to several anecdotes and ballads. There are eight pages of illustrations. The end-papers are devoted to an excellent map of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

IN DEUTSCHEN LANDEN, by Josef K. L. Bihl. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953. \$3.00. Beautifully printed and illustrated, this text represents an ambitious effort to meet the growing demand for reading material of a cultural nature. In 200 pages closely packed with text, maps, and a great many attractive illustrations the author, by tracing the course of five great rivers, acquaints the reader not only with the topography but also with many of the historical and cultural traditions of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Indeed, the chief difficulty with this book may be that it contains *too* much information in too highly compressed a form. One wonders if it might not be wiser to suppress some of the minor details (one example for many: the names of the emperors buried in the Speyer cathedral, page 53) and to expand certain more rewarding topics. No concessions have been made either in vocabulary or in syntax to the student learning to read. Despite the visible vocabulary, the text would probably prove difficult for a third-semester student. Despite these reservations, however, *In deutschen Landen*, with its wealth of material and handsome appearance, is a welcome addition to our available cultural readers.

AMERIKA UND DEUTSCHLAND. PARALLEL LIVES OF GREAT AMERICANS AND GERMANS, by A. E. Zucker. Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953. In the introduction, Professor Zucker acknowledges his debt to Plutarch as far as the general arrangement of this reader is concerned; the notion of presenting parallel biographies of outstanding Germans and Americans is indeed a promising one. After an introductory chapter devoted to the Pilgrim Fathers and the Thirty Years War, the book proceeds to relate the lives and accomplishments of the following: Franklin and Lessing, Washington and Frederick the Great, Jefferson and Humboldt, Foster and Beethoven, Longfellow and Goethe, Lincoln and Bismarck. A concluding chapter fittingly deals with the career of a great German-American: Carl Schurz. Significantly enough, it is only in the field of art (Longfellow, Foster) that the Americans suffer by comparison with their German counterparts. The reader is intended for second or third-semester students and should prove to be stimulating and interesting fare. In a later edition, more felicitous turns of expression might be found in some instances. Questions, a selective visible vocabulary, and an end vocabulary are provided.

CULTURAL GRADED READERS, GERMAN SERIES, I: SUTTER, II: STEUBEN, III: CARL SCHURZ, by C. R. Goedsche and W. E. Glaettli. The American Book Company, 1953. \$0.75 each. German teachers are currently in the fortunate position of being able to choose among several sets of good graded readers. In this competition the present series should prove to be strong contenders, especially since, from the first booklet on, they provide connected material of considerable intrinsic interest. Book I contains 612 new words, Book II 257, and Book III 226, the majority of which occur in Purin's *Standard German Vocabulary*. The texts are respectively 32, 33, and 36 pages long, including numerous illustrations. A visible vocabulary is provided in footnotes on each page, and each booklet contains a complete end vocabulary. The exercise material contains questions on the text, vocabulary review, and practice in the recognition of verb forms.

ERZÄHL MIR WAS! by Henry Blauth and Kurt Roderbourg. Ginn and Company, 1953. \$3.25. This text is apparently intended as an elementary reader, to be begun relatively early in the first semester in German. The authors have made a determined effort to grade both the vocabulary and the grammar, although judging by the last story in the book, an adaptation of Keller's *Kleider machen Leute*, the curve is a rather steep one. One can only applaud the avowed objectives of the authors "To present material which is of genuine interest to the student. . . . To give a maximum amount and variety of cultural information. . . . To make the student aware of a national mentality differing from his own." Each teacher must decide for himself to what extent these objectives have been attained. The selections are in several instances paraphrases of standard literary works, including, in addition to the Keller story already mentioned, *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick*, and extracts from Raabe, Gotthelf, Ebner-Eschenbach, etc. The fifty page of carefully worked-out exercises comprise questions on the text, drills on word formation, and treatment of various grammatical difficulties (recognition grammar). The end vocabulary is supplemented by visible vocabulary in footnotes. The book is illustrated with line drawings.

SCHNITZLER, KAFKA, MANN, edited by Henry Hatfield and Jack M. Stein. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953. \$2.50. Carefully edited and tastefully bound and printed, this text is an indication of an increasing concern to provide our students with mature contemporary reading material in readily accessible form. The book contains Schnitzler's *Leutnant Gustl*, Kafka's *Der Heizer*, and an extract from Mann's *Joseph der Ernährer*, offered by the editors "in the belief that for literary merit, intrinsic interest, and maturity they need not fear comparison with contemporary works read in other courses." The introductions to the individual selections are well-calculated to stimulate interest in the literary and human problems involved without burdening the student with unnecessary information. Uncommon words are glossed in footnotes on each page; these words have then been omitted from the end vocabulary. Detailed questions are provided for each story. The most novel feature

of the book is the appendix, dealing in considerable detail with such difficulties as adverbial particles, demonstrative pronouns, extended attributes, and "pointer words." Small superior numbers in the text refer the student to the appropriate section of the appendix when such difficulties occur. Here he finds not only an explanation of the difficulty but also a number of examples culled from the stories he is reading. This is an excellent pedagogical device, which might well find further application in new textbooks.

—J. D. W.

BOOK REVIEWS

Fifty Years with Goethe, 1901-1951. Collected Studies.

By A. R. Hohlfeld, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1953. XIV + 400 pages. \$5.00.

The promise implied in the title of this book is redeemed literally by its contents. It offers reprints of sixteen studies published in the years 1901 to 1945 together with an essay written in 1951 and now published for the first time. The volume, edited by Norbert Fuerst and H. J. Meessen, serves the dual purpose of paying tribute to the acknowledged master of American Goethe scholarship and of perpetuating a tradition of painstaking research coupled with noble idealism. Professor Hohlfeld offers a picture of Goethe the man which is loving without adulation, and a view of the poet which is consistent but not dogmatic. One admires the steadiness of Hohlfeld's vision, and one admires even more the scrupulousness of his method. His way of reading and analyzing poetic texts, imaginatively and yet cautiously, will remain exemplary as long as literary scholars remember that they, too, should be philologists, that is lovers of the word. The pedagogical value of these studies is as great as their contribution to the knowledge of Goethe.

Much of what Hohlfeld wrote in the fifty years covered by this volume has since become accepted fact or standard opinion. The study of "Pact and Wager in Goethe's *Faust*" with which the book opens is a model of how a complex matter may be presented simply and lucidly. The author asks and answers twelve questions, scoring a bull's-eye with every shot. His discussion of the Eckermann studies by Petersen and Houben, his estimate of Korff's *Faustischer Glaube*, his detailed reviews of the *Faust* commentaries by Trendelenburg, Petsch, Witkowski, and Beutler are such that few will quarrel with the position he has taken in them. The essay on "Goethe's Conception of World Literature" and the studies of "Umlaut und Reim" and of "Goethes Reime" broke new ground and have not to my knowledge been challenged.

The situation is different, however, with regard to the essays on the "Irdische Ausgang von Goethes Faustdichtung" and on *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. In both these cases Hohlfeld deals with extremely difficult matters in which scholarly opinion has varied widely. Put briefly and somewhat crudely, the question at issue in the *Faust* essay is whether Faust's life as a whole, and especially his activity as a colonizer and ruler in the second half of his long life, should be condemned as a horrible example of selfishness and brutality or admired as reflecting a noble mind and a pure purpose which, however, are subject to the weakness of the human flesh. As one rereads Hohlfeld's essay and gives due consideration to his latest contribution, "Weitere Betrachtungen zum irdischen Ausgang," the conclusion is

inescapable, I believe, that his arguments carry much greater weight than those of his opponents. Goethe's words both within the tragedy and without it (even leaving aside Eckermann's reports as being of doubtful reliability) simply do not permit us to speak of Faust as a criminal or to assert that there is no value whatever in his striving. On the other hand, Hohlfeld may not always stress sufficiently the seriousness of Faust's sins and errors, and he may overestimate the value of Faust's practical accomplishments. Indeed he tends to regard Faust's shift from the contemplative and the aesthetic states to practical activity as in itself constituting progress, although Faust himself does not seem to think too highly of "mere" achievement: "Ich habe nur begehrt und nur vollbracht." In other words, the question which, to this reviewer at least, remains open is what Goethe meant in describing his work as a tragedy. Did he not wish us to understand that his Faust, like all tragic heroes, fails in his quest, but that, again like all tragic heroes, he is great and admirable because he persists in it? That Faust is redeemed not because he progresses but because he endures? And that he represents the nobility of man not in the manner of his life but in its aims? What sets Faust apart from and above the great figures of tragic literature is not his superior virtue or greater success, but the scope and direction of his striving. For whereas they pursue specific ends, Faust's quest is directed toward the perennial ideals of mankind, the true, the beautiful, and the good.

However this may be, there is no doubt that Hohlfeld's essays have greatly narrowed the area within which it is possible for conscientious scholars to disagree — a mighty achievement even if put in these minimum terms. Moreover, the urbanity of his polemics and the circumspection of his reasoning are such that there is but a single point in which he seems to have done his opponents an injustice. I refer to the suggestion (p. 94) that those who judge Faust's character adversely are really animated by a desire to cast doubt on Goethe's own humaneness. Hohlfeld himself is far from considering Faust a portrait or mouthpiece of Goethe, and more recent Goethe scholarship has generally tended to make a clear distinction between the poet and his work. Those, for example (and I have admitted that I am among them), who think of *Faust* as a tragedy do not necessarily believe that all striving for the realization of ideals must end tragically, or that this was Goethe's opinion. *Faust* is not primarily a poetic rendering of Goethe's philosophy but a work of literature written in conformity with an established genre, tragedy. Faust's detractors speak of him as if he were a real person and not a dramatic character, and Professor Hohlfeld, in agreeing to meet them on their own ground, allows himself to be drawn from a discussion of aesthetic questions to a discussion of philosophy and ethics. The contemporaries of Napoleon had to decide whether to admire his greatness or to condemn his indifference to the misery which he caused: the historian may do both, and the tragic poet must. It is of the essence of tragedy that moral judgment is suspended, that it allows us to perceive the greatness, yes even the goodness and the purity of men some of whose actions are horrible. Why should Faust be considered to need moral vindication when murderers like Oedipus and Macbeth and Othello do not?

Hohlfeld's article on the *Wanderjahre* was originally published as a reply to two articles by the late Karl Viëtor, who also wrote a rejoinder (*PMLA*, LIX, 142-183, 1166-72; LX, 399-426). Viëtor's major premise is the belief that Goethe in 1829 was too old and too busy to think of writing a third part of *Wilhelm Meister*, but that he hoped to write more poems expounding the philosophical fruits of his studies of nature. Hohlfeld's major premise, on the other hand, is the belief that Goethe was dissatisfied with the way he had concluded the *Wanderjahre* and wished his readers to know this. As a consequence, Viëtor asserts that the words "Ist fortzusetzen" at the end of the first two editions of the *Wanderjahre* (second version) must refer to the poem "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's" which concluded the novel in those editions, whereas Hohlfeld believes that they refer to

the novel itself. In my opinion the problem is insoluble. There simply isn't sufficient evidence to decide the question. The arguments adduced by each of the two scholars to demolish the thesis of the other are much stronger than those adduced to prove his own view. Viëtor justly points out that Hohlfeld's chain of reasoning contains a number of purely speculative links. Hohlfeld, on the other hand, is entirely right in saying that Viëtor attaches far too much weight to typographical matters which Goethe may not have authorized and which he may not have noticed and therefore not have corrected for the second edition. Viëtor rightly stresses the care with which Goethe and his collaborators prepared the *Ausgabe letzter Hand*, but Hohlfeld is no less right in emphasizing that actual proof was read at the print shop in Augsburg and not in Weimar. Viëtor brushes aside too lightly the fact that the only extant manuscript of the poem does not contain the phrase "Ist fortzusetzen," whereas Hohlfeld jumps to the conclusion that this autograph was the exemplar of the printer's copy. According to Viëtor (pp. 176, 422), Goethe would have been guilty of a conscious mystification of his readers if he intended the phrase to refer to the novel but allowed it to appear in a place and type which connect it with the poem. But Hohlfeld (pp. 268, 288) points out with equal justice that Viëtor's interpretation of the phrase also implies that Goethe intended to mystify his readers. Moreover, Viëtor's admittedly far-fetched interpretation is by no means the only hypothesis which he permits himself, although he claims this in the last sentence of his rejoinder (see, for example, p. 424, line 20). Viëtor's reading of Goethe's letter to Götting (pp. 1167 f.) is correct and Hohlfeld's (pp. 273 f.) is wrong, but Viëtor uses the letter to show that Goethe cannot have thought of writing a third part of *Wilhelm Meister*, whereas Hohlfeld merely argues that Goethe felt a third part was desirable. And so on.

I do not wish to suggest that the controversy was futile. Quite the contrary. In the first place, it is a rare pleasure (and a most instructive experience) to watch two scholars of such caliber argue out a difficult matter, searching for remote evidence and drawing on all the available aids, sparring like experienced pugilists and striking hard at the slightest weakness on the other side. (My pleasure was marred only by Viëtor's jibe on p. 422. His admission on p. 1169 gave Hohlfeld an opening for a similar blow, but it was not used). More importantly, the discussion has resulted in agreement on several points. Both Hohlfeld and Viëtor believe that the unhappy phrase does not refer to the aphorisms in *Wilhelm Meister*; they agree also that a continuation of the poem itself is out of the question; and they admit that "Ist fortzusetzen" cannot be taken in the usual sense of an actual promise to continue either the poem or the novel. Thirdly and finally, the discussion has shown that neither the "novel theory" nor the "poem theory" can be ruled out on the basis of the available facts. The question must remain open unless more decisive evidence should come to light.

University of Wisconsin.

—Heinrich Henel

Liebe zum deutschen Gedicht.

Von Wilhelm Schneider. Freiburg: Herder, 1952. 374 Seiten. DM 13.50.

Dieses Buch ist weder lyrische Anthologie noch systematische Poetik. In einer Auswahl von sechsunddreißig Gedichten aus mehreren Jahrhunderten der deutschen Literatur — von Gryphius bis LeFort — sucht der Verfasser Gehalt und Gestalt der Lyrik einem weiteren Kreise zu erschließen, verständnisvoll genießende Leser für das lyrische Gedicht zu gewinnen. Die ausgewählten Gedichte sind nach Motivkreise, z. B. „Liebe,“ „Gott und Welt,“ „Tod,“ in sieben Gruppen eingeteilt, innerhalb jeder Gruppe nach ihrer zeitlichen Folge aneinander gereiht und einzeln betrachtet. Diese Anordnung macht sinnfällig, wie verschiedene Zeiten und Dichter einen gleichen oder ähnlichen Gegenstand empfunden und gestaltet haben.

Der Wert dieser Gedichtsanalyse für den Lehrer liegt darin, daß Schneider, der ehemalige Bonner Professor für Stilkunde, sich an den Laien, nicht an den

Fachmann, richtet. Gerade auch für den literarischen Unterricht in unserem Lande ist es nötig, sich dauernd zu vergegenwärtigen, daß das dem Fachmann Selbstverständliche dem Studenten als ästhetisches Neuland gewonnen werden muß. Das vergißt sich allzu oft und allzu leicht. Vor dieser akademischen Unachtsamkeit dürfte diese Art wissenschaftlich gründlicher und zugleich fesselnder, doch nicht herablassender Darstellung schützen und bewahren. Auch wenn es sich sogar annehmen ließe – dieses rein hypothetisch! – daß dieser oder jener Leser mit keinen Ergebnissen dieser Gedichtbetrachtungen einverstanden wäre, so hat man doch immer wieder das überzeugte Empfinden: so muß das Gedicht in seiner sprachlichen, metrischen und rhythmischen Form erschlossen werden unter Vermeidung jeder empfindungsselligen Schöngestei. Nur so wird es überhaupt möglich, daß das oft ausgesprochene *lyrica non leguntur* an Gültigkeit und Reichweite unter uns – in einer eigentlich unlyrischen Zeit – verliert.

University of Wisconsin.

—Walter Gausewitz

Novalis: Der Dichter der blauen Blume.

By Friedrich Hiebel. Bern: A. Francke AG Verlag, 1951. 361 pp.

Among an endless array of general essays, textual analyses, interpretations of individual works, and literary comparisons that have grown up around the personality of Friedrich von Hardenberg, one could hitherto find only three brief studies, all half a century old, that might be called critical biographies. Now that the first really comprehensive work in this category has been written, a major gap in German literary criticism is filled, and the service has been rendered by a German scholar teaching at an American university, who has combined the respect for mystic experience and metaphysical idealism to be expected of German scholarship with the concise exposition, thorough documentation, and lucid style which we like to consider standard here.

Almost every page of Professor Hiebel's book gives evidence that years of intense scholarship and serious thought have gone into its preparation. The arrangement in sections devoted to early biography, aphorisms, tales, and major works skilfully combines the chronological with the topical. A method that might well be emulated in other critical studies is the full accounting given to primary and secondary sources in notes at the end, numbered by the pages of the text, with virtually complete elimination of the pedantic gadgetry encumbering the usual American critical "apparatus." The work of earlier scholars is thoroughly digested and united with a wealth of new insights. The author convincingly demonstrates the importance of Goethe as a stimulus and point of reference in Novalis' development and as a partial model for such figures as the Master at Sais and Klingsohr, though at the cost of exaggerating Novalis' relative stature. Professor Hiebel most successfully illuminates the thought, symbolism, and myth of each individual creation in terms of the others. Numerous detailed problems, such as the Greek Singer in the Fifth Hymn to Night and the recurrent symbols of the Veil and the Flame, find happy solutions. A new principle of interpretation, distinguishing allegorical, symbolical, and personal levels of meaning, is fruitfully applied to Klingsohr's Tale.

Is this then the long sought key to Novalis? As far as interpretation of the poet's intention is concerned, Professor Hiebel has indeed furnished us a key to nearly every hidden recess. Yet, for many of us the most baffling problem will remain unsolved. It is our experience, on every return to this mystic poet, of a compelling sense of profound, transcendent insight, which is then all too soon effaced under a welter of hopeless contradictions, immaturities, and extravagancies. It is the corruption of an authentic moment of ecstasy, a wistfully beautiful vision, and an enchantingly vibrant music by a jumble of esoteric learning and personal desire. Our credulity and patience are taxed, not by the original experience at Sophie's grave, but by the intellectual superstructure of pre-Christian and Gnostic cult, Neo-Platonic speculation, medieval astrology and alchemy, and Baroque mystic theory.

We may accept the mystic principle of a fundamental unity in living experience, but a path to this unity by way of the self — even a higher, transcendent Self — impresses us as an ethical short-cut in contrast with the self-effacement and active service lived and preached by a Meister Eckhart or a St. Francis. The identification of a saucy girl, just entering adolescence and uninitiated into the mysteries of orthography, with the principle of cosmic wisdom, with the Virgin Mary, and with Christ, reaches the ultimate in irreverent nonsense, and one turns in revulsion from the erotic interpretation of the Eucharist.

Critics like Obenauer and Hiebel, representing a branch of theosophical doctrine closely allied to that of Novalis, fail to appreciate the dilemma of the poet's non-theosophical readers, and so these critics can extol some of the most presumptuous notions as profound paradox, pass them off as superficial flaws, or even discretely evade them. This last Professor Hiebel does when he limits his chapter on Magic Idealism to the esthetic concept of *Romantisieren* without touching upon Novalis' striving for an arbitrary control of physical experience through personal will. How close such criticism can come to apologetics becomes evident when Professor Hiebel turns to face the crucial questions and objections: He concedes that *Die Christenheit oder Europa* distorts history but justifies this on the grounds that Novalis treats historical events as the text for a moral sermon, the hieroglyphs of a spiritual chronicle — as though a preacher had a right to falsify Scripture or an archaeologist to deface his inscription! At another point Professor Hiebel argues (201): "Verneint man die Realität übersinnlicher Erfahrung überhaupt, dann schlosse man mit Novalis eine ganze Welt ihm verwandter Geister aus dem Kulturleben der Menschheit aus. Zweifelt man aber an dem Wahrheitsgehalt seines Erlebens, dann spräche man ein vernichtendes Urteil über die Echtheit seines poetischen Talentes." The conclusions are unjustified. We remain free to recognize the reality of super-sensuous experience while preferring the interpretations given it by wiser and more humble spirits than Novalis. We may reject his cosmogony and still acclaim his poetic genius.

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—Raymond Immerwahr



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